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SCANDINAVIAN CLASSICS
VOLUME XX

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PER HALLSTRÖM:
SELECTED SHORT STORIES

THIS VOLUME IS ENDOWED BY
MR. CHARLES S. PETERSON
OF CHICAGO

PER HALLSTRÖM:

SELECTED SHORT STORIES

TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH BY

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INTRODUCTION

IN THE history of Swedish literature the last decade of the nineteenth century will always claim an important place. Not only did the period see the rise and development of no less than six or seven great writers, but it was also an epoch of change. The writers of the time are not bound together by any common cause, but it can now be seen that their work marked a common reaction against the positivist and realistic traditions of the preceding decade. The eighties were years of dissatisfaction, of scepticism, revolt, and emancipation; their representative in Sweden is Strindberg. The influence of Ibsen and of the French naturalists is strongly stamped upon them. Women writers then first begin to take an important place in literature; description, keen observation, and analysis are in vogue; philosophy has a strongly positivist bias; literature is centred in the capital. The great writers of the nineties—von Heidenstam, Fröding, Selma Lagerlöf, Oscar Levertin, Per Hallström, Pelle Molin—open an age of imagination and symbolism. A tendency to separate literature from the political and social questions of the hour is accompanied by a return to tradition, patriotism, and the past; there is a renewal of enthusiasm and poetic glow. Realism is no longer

conceived of as gray and featureless, but as full of interesting facts to note, moods to capture, individual fates to follow. The important influences are Renan and Nietzsche, the former regarded as the cultured, sceptical, aristocratic humanist, the latter as the rediscoverer of the heroic in art and life. The leadership in literature passes out from Stockholm to the provinces.[1]

It is in part because he seems to share in both these two opposing currents of thought that Per Hallström holds a somewhat isolated and special place among Swedish writers. His first prose book, *Vilsna fåglar* (*Strayed Birds*), consists of short impressionistic sketches from life, in which the gift of psychological intuition, the satirical humor, and the power of sympathy with the outcasts of society, all so characteristic of this author, are already abundantly manifest. In several other respects he has affinities with the writers of the eighties, in particular in his insistence upon moral values, his detestation of injustice, lies, and shams, his restless, doubting, critical temperament. But his later work, while preserving some of these tendencies, is no less definitely romantic. The stories in *Purpur* (*Purple*) show a characteristic love of color and a desire to escape into the ampler air of the imagination which are paralleled in Lever-

[1] Cp. F. Böök, *Sveriges moderna litteratur,* Stockholm 1921, chaps. V and XI, *passim.*

tin's *Legender och visor,* Heidenstam's *Hans Alienus,* and in *Gösta Berlings saga.*[1] An ever-strengthening mystical tendency runs through the plays and stories of a later period, in which the transforming, dignifying, and ennobling power of death comes to be a leading motif; while almost everything he writes—short stories, plays, novels, poems, and at times even the essays—is touched by an all-pervading lyricism.

But there are further characteristics which contribute to set Hallström apart from other Swedish writers. The genius of Swedish literature has hitherto been mainly lyrical; Hallström's deep interest in the workings of the human mind, his subtle psychology—sometimes so subtle as to incur the charge of being too exclusively intellectual—is perhaps his most noteworthy and original contribution to the literature of his country. Again, hardly any Swedish writer can rival him in width of range and power of adaptability. He roams at will through all lands and ages. The Palestine of Old Testament days, the Greece of the mythological period, medieval Europe, Italy at varying stages of her civilization and history, the France of the Revolution, modern America, Stockholm and the solitudes of his native Sweden—any and every scene can be made to serve as a background to the story, and rarely indeed can any false note

[1] *Ibid.,* p. 278.

be detected. This unusual color and variety have perhaps mitigated against Hallström's popularity in his own country, but should serve to make him more easily appreciated abroad. His lack of formal academic training and his early contact with life have also helped to differentiate him from the majority of his fellow-writers.

The outside facts of Hallström's life are soon told. Born in Stockholm on September 29, 1866, he studied engineering at the Technical College of that city and in 1888 went out to America as chemist at a factory in Chicago. Returning in 1890, he held a government post for a time and then went to live in Florence. From 1904 to 1905 he was dramatic critic to the Stockholm paper *Dagens Nyheter,* and since 1906 he has settled down at Saltsjö-Storängen, near Stockholm, devoting himself to writing. He was elected a member of the Swedish Academy in 1908, and is one of the committee which awards the Nobel prize for literature, and notwithstanding his retiring disposition and dislike of publicity, honors of various kinds have not been withheld from him.

On the subject of his early life and first publications Hallström is his own best interpreter. In a paper contributed to a collection published by the Swedish Authors' Society,[1] for which various prominent authors were asked to write upon the

[1] *När vi började.* Stockholm, 1902.

subject of "My First Book," he tells of his lonely and melancholy boyhood, his early passion for English poetry and later discovery of Carlyle and Goethe, the vivid and not altogether happy impressions made upon him by his life in America, the beginning of the short tales afterwards collected in *Vilsna fåglar* and *Purpur,* and the publication and failure of his first book, a volume of poems entitled *Lyrik och fantasier* (1891). A detached critical outlook upon life and a certain pessimism are strongly marked features of this early period, and though softened and completed by other qualities in later years, they have never entirely disappeared. In the matter of form the choice of the short sketch proved to be significant. Among the poems written at this period were several in narrative style, and Hallström, to quote his own words, had already begun "to feel his way towards that domain which was to become his own—the short story." In later years, as a glance at the bibliographical note which follows these pages will show, he was to develop an extraordinary productiveness in several branches of the literary art. His lyrics contain many fine things, he has achieved success in the drama, and he has latterly shown himself to be a critic of no mean ability. But competent judges agree in hailing him as the master of the short story in Sweden. These tales with their varying moods of lyrical beauty,

deep pathos, keen wit, and sharp-sighted observation and intuition, their richness of imagination, and their typically Swedish feeling for nature, are masterpieces in an admittedly difficult art, and upon them all the author's care and feeling have been lavished.

Scattered up and down Hallström's essays can be found remarks which illustrate the lines upon which his stories are laid down. In a paper on Rabindranath Tagore,[1] speaking of the *Glimpses of Bengal,* he writes: "As was in general the case with the short story during the literary period to which the book belongs (the period of Hallström's own *Vilsna fåglar*) they are rather sketches than tales with which we have here to do. The theme of the genuine short story is almost a concentrated drama, and if the treatment is fully in accord there will be at one and the same time vigorous conciseness and harmoniously rounded outlines. In its miniature form the short story has scope for greatness in the details and a single yet wide perspective—like the Florentine medallion of pre-Renaissance times. The more it tends to become an episode or a separate fragment of a novel, a description of types or *milieu,* the more remote is it from the sculptural and the nearer it approaches to painting or drawing." Again, in an essay on Cervantes's *Novelas Ejemplares,* in-

[1] The last essay in *Levande dikt.*

spired by the ter-centenary of 1916,[1] he points out that the development of intrigue and incident in the Italian *novella* was not accompanied by any deepening of psychological insight or widening of philosophical basis, and that Cervantes's originality lay just here. "He could give life and meaning even to that which was dry and barren, and fill out the enlarged form of the short story as a pioneer for later ages." It is possible that Hallström himself owes something to Cervantes, and he has certainly learned from Shakespeare, of the organic nature of whose imagination and methods of dramatic composition he writes thus in another essay: *"Here, as in the world of reality, the universe re-echoes in the individual fate, hangs upon it by a thousand slender threads. The drama is not isolated upon a stage, it moves past like a stream, where wind and waves have come from far and have farther yet to go."*[2]

These passages, and in particular the one just quoted, will suffice to suggest what are the main features of Hallström's best and most characteristic work in the domain of the short story. He sees farther and implies more than Maupassant, with whom he has been compared[3] and upon whose "natural limitation of thought, vision, and feel-

[1] Published in *Konst och liv,* second essay.
[2] *Konst och liv,* third essay.
[3] By Ola Hansson in the *Nordisk Revy* for 1895. The article refers only to *Vilsna fåglar.*

ing" he shrewdly comments in the above-mentioned paper on Tagore. While Hallström has not the Frenchman's marvelous clearness of outline and is far from possessing, or even aiming at, his direct and concise style, he is ever on the watch for those subtle connections which bind up the individual human life with the universal and the infinite, and it is this feature of his work that lends to it much of its originality and power. He is chiefly concerned with mental states, emotional crises, and moral ideas, the incidents that give rise to these assuming quite a secondary place. His favorite method is to use all the material at his disposal—lyrical setting, characters, and plot—in working up to one supreme moment when the individual life or lives become transformed and lost in the glory or sombre majesty of some universal human experience. The method is exemplified in *A Humble Tragedy* and *The Gardener's Wife,* still better in *Hidden Fires* and *The Water-Finder.* And of all such experiences the hour of death is the greatest and most universal. The thought of Death as the deliverer, the reconciler, the great compensator for the wrongs and injustice of life, runs through all Hallstörm's work, and he has composed a whole collection of stories, *Thanatos,* upon this very motif. Yet it is no mere intellectual conviction with him, but a deep truth intuitively perceived and devoutly cherished. The greatness

of death lends to every life a greatness, so that even so commonplace an individual as Janson, the central character in *A Humble Tragedy,* is caught up in the presence of death and transformed, at least for the time being, into "something rich and strange." Next to Death comes Love, but it is noteworthy here that with Hallström the ruling principle of love is not passion but self-abnegation (cp. *Hidden Fires*), and this, like death, means also liberation from the self. Hallström's sympathy with the "strayed birds" of the community—derived in part from Tolstoi and Dostoievski—is also largely based upon the idea of a common mortality. In his compassion, his sense of life as one and of individual human existence as an illusion, and his belief in a chain of causes (see especially *Carneola*), Hallström, as Böök has pointed out, is obviously influenced by Schopenhauer, though he is without the German philosopher's contempt of reality or hatred of men. The charge of pessimism has often been brought against him, yet he is no mere pessimist. Rather is it, as Georg Brandes has well said, that Hallström "seems inclined to conceive of that heightening of life's emotions which we call happiness as thriving better in hope or in remembrance than in the daily reality."[1] No writer has seen

[1] G. Brandes, *Samlede Skrifter* (Copenhagen, 1906), XVII, p. 199.

more clearly that the life which has not known its share of suffering, self-devotion, and self-discipline can never reach the topmost heights to which human nature may attain.

In the selecting of the stories here translated, prominence has been given to tales with a Swedish setting. Three in particular, *Melchior, Hidden Fires,* and *The Water-Finder,* will, it is hoped, even in translation, convey some idea of the wonderful imaginative power of Hallström's descriptions of nature. The scenery and natural setting of the story are no mere ornaments which, though constituting an added beauty, are still not absolutely indispensable: they are just as integral a part of the story as any of the characters or incidents, while the descriptions themselves are often so vivid as to produce an almost physical effect. *Symposium, Amor,* and *Don Juan's Rubies* will serve to illustrate, among other things, the author's gift of humor. In his earlier stories this often takes a satirical turn, but in the later collections there is also to be found humor of a more genial order. *Carneola* exhibits the combined richness and restraint of Hallström's imagination, while *The Gardener's Wife* is a beautiful illustration of how pathos may be kept within artistic limits, and never allowed to degenerate into sentimentality. *A Secret Idyll* reflects with remarkable fidelity the pathos of the French Revolution.

In form and style this writer has a manner all his own. While the story has harmony and proportion and is usually built up around some single moral idea, Hallström permits himself as many ramifications and side-issues as he pleases before the structure is completed. "No style can bear less resemblance to the straight line than Per Hallström's."[1] His method of narration is rather by ever-widening circles which, ere they reach their goal, have succeeded in including many wonderful and beautiful, if not strictly essential, things that one would not willingly forego. While the reader's patience may occasionally be taxed by these digressions, it is doubtful whether the suggestiveness and profound implications of some of the stories could be achieved in any other way. A minor point of interest is that instead of following the common practice of giving to each collection the title of the first story in it, Hallström invents a title for the whole book which binds it together under some single aspect and happily brings out the essential note of the whole. Such titles are *Strayed Birds, Purple, Thanatos, The Four Elements.* The stories chosen for the present volume therefore suffer from being torn out of the collections to which they belong, though this disadvantage may perhaps be partly compensated by the greater variety gained.

[1] Levertin.

Per Hallström is a writer with a remarkable combination of gifts, an extremely wide range, and many qualities which, but for the accident of language, would have made him far more widely known. His intimate knowledge and warm appreciation of English literature,[1] his imaginative power, and the strongly moral significance of his work are some of the reasons why he should be especially appreciated in English-speaking countries. The vague suggestiveness and occasional heaviness and obscurity of his style render him by no means an easy author to translate, and none can be more sensible than the present translator of the defects of this attempt. Yet it seemed regrettable that so serious an artist, with so wide a range of sympathies and culture, and one, moreover, whose early imagination was fed and nourished on the nectar and ambrosia of English Romantic poetry, should remain for so long comparatively unknown in those foreign countries where he was most likely to be appreciated.

I desire to express my thanks to the author himself for the ready sanction he has given to my undertaking, and for his great kindness in advising

[1] Hallström's knowledge of the English national character would seem to be less complete, while he sees only one side, and that not the greatest, of American life and character. But it has not been thought necessary to dwell in this place upon his recent political essays, papers which in their very nature are ephemeral and which may be omitted from a consideration of their author's more enduring and more purely literary work.

me in the matter of the selection of the stories. In this difficult task of selection I have further had the advantage of the kind assistance of Professor Böök, of the University of Lund, my indebtedness to whose writings (*Sveriges moderna litteratur, Sveriges nationallitteratur, Essayer och kritiker,* and articles in *Ord och Bild* and *Svenska Dagbladet*) may be here generally acknowledged. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Böök for his friendly advice and encouragement in the initial stages of my work. Lastly, Dr. Eilert Ekwall, Professor of English in the same university, has been good enough to spend some hours in assisting me over various difficulties of language, and to him also, for this as for other acts of kindness, my sincere thanks are due. For the final choice of the stories, as well as for all defects in the translation, I myself must accept full responsibility.

F. J. FIELDEN.

Lund, October, 1921.

SYMPOSIUM

[*SYMPOSION*]

FROM VILSNA FÅGLAR

1894

Symposium

ANY ONE who met Herr Oswald Heinrich von Riesenbach briskly making his way towards the old aristocratic quarter of Philadelphia, with a familiar glance at the dreary rigid houses, could easily gather from a number of minor characteristics, almost impossible to seize individually —the concave arch of his back, the curve of his mustache, the grasp of his fingers round the handle of his stick—that his name was von Riesenbach and that he represented that portion of the nobility of Europe which, without forgetting its privileges of birth, was modern enough here in the New World to devote itself to work with feverish energy and attach little importance to mere outward elegance of attire.

Any one meeting him a few moments later on the other side of Oliver Street, where the fine houses show their straight backs only and a quite humble class of society begins, could with equal certainty conclude from his lingering steps and his interested and observant glances that he was called von Riesenbach and that, in addition to the qualities already mentioned, he had enough of warm humanity in him to study also the struggles of the lower classes, and to employ his abundant

leisure time in taking walks and enriching his memory with amusing trifles.

In both cases Herr von Riesenbach would have been judged aright, yet only so as a great actor's creations are rightly understood, for Herr von Riesenbach did not live in the elegant quarter, he had nothing to do, and consequently was never in any hurry to get home; neither had he the slightest interest in the life of the poorer streets, for this, on the contrary, was a torment to him. But he lived, quite unpretentiously, in one of these streets, and this was only his artfully elaborated plan for reaching his dwelling without being suspected of it, while he obviously gave every one to know that he lived in one of the respectable houses with asphalt in front, and balconies, and a view on to some scanty green space and a church or two.

Properly, he was not called von Riesenbach either, but had taken the name from his mother in the hope of thereby attaining what he had conceived as his object in life in America—a marriage with some rich girl.

I have forgotten to mention that he had been an officer in the reserve, but that goes without saying, since he was a German immigrant; he had also possessed a diamond breastpin and a ring with a large pearl in it, which he used to twirl round absent-mindedly as he sat in the tram cars.

But that was before the date of this story.

Of the diamond there now remained only certain inscriptions on the windows that had once been von Riesenbach's, and a Jew had flicked at the pearl with his long black nails and said that "it was not ripe, and therefore hardly worth twenty dollars, but he supposed he could take it for a little while." Since that day he had now been in undisturbed possession of it for several months.

Von Riesenbach had gone down in the world, and the above description no longer quite fitted him, for now he never visited the elegant quarters of the town, but kept to the river banks, the factory districts, and the outer parks, and he no longer lived in the humble street. He had no home at all; he slept where he could, and latterly—since the weather was warm—for the most part in one of the suburbs. He looked for work, but rarely found any, and never managed to keep it. He could do nothing; he was gloomy and seemed made on purpose for Irish navvies to exercise their wit upon; and so he went about starving, shyly turning corners, and constantly wandering deeper and deeper into a labyrinth, as it seemed to him.

He pondered and brooded as he went. He was not at all of a critical turn of mind and had never had a superabundance of ideas, but when he stood hungry in front of a window full of articles of food, more ideas came than he could well

manage—catastrophic ideas, whose consequences pushed him still more helplessly aside than the stern reality had done. He felt a gnawing envy of well-nigh every one, could not hide his feelings under a finer name, and suffered at the fact. At last he took refuge in longing, in calling to mind his happier position before he had been fool enough to fling it away, and in cherishing timid expectations of some chance which would set him on his feet again. He was the most luckless of vagabonds because he could not bring himself to belong to the class. He felt like some disguised Haroun al Raschid under the bastinado and unable to prove his identity.

One sunny morning he was shaking the blood into his veins outside a white villa, dejectedly meditating plans for getting breakfast, when a figure which he seemed to recognize came along the street.

It was a German named Müller, a broad-shouldered, keen-eyed fellow who had studied everything under the sun, and, as he himself expressed it, was acquainted with the portals to all the temples of knowledge, yet could never even get a post as porter or watch-dog at any of them—he had never had enough regard for his dignity. "And if I'm not even fit for a professorship in this country," he would sigh over his glass of beer, "I'll gladly set up as a nigger, one of those who

act the 'Living Head' at village fairs, and stick their topknots through a hole for people to shy balls at, three shies for five cents."

He had almost reached the necessary tint now, tanned as he was by dust and sunshine. His private tutorships in German families were long since a thing of the past, and so were the soles of his boots.

Riesenbach had met him in beer-shops in better days, and his robust loquacity had not exactly appealed to him, but now he thought a little chat might warm him up. He was curious to know the reason for the other's haste, a thing so temptingly unusual when one has an ocean of time about one. Müller greeted him in friendly but absent-minded fashion: "You, too, a man of the guild? Well, how d'you like it now? Tell me straight!" He looked inquiringly at him, as if the answer were impossible to guess. "It has its different sides.— But excuse me, I'm in a hurry. Will you come along and have something to eat?"

The word "eat" drove out all the others. "With pleasure! I'm hungry."

"Hungry? Let's hurry up, then. My appetite, too, is best in the mornings. It's practice, you see; I seldom eat other times. And besides, how could one better show one's joy in existence than" —here his voice took on a caressing tone, as though he were about to touch on some familiar and well-

loved topic—"than by eating a nice fresh loaf and drinking milk to it on a lovely morning like this?"

"Hm! Beer and meat wouldn't be a bad way, either."

"Beer! Beer, you say, and meat? I'm sorry for you. That speech points to a materialistic grossness of mind, such as ill suits our butterfly existences."

They had reached a clean-swept little street of peaceful red two-storied houses, with white window casements and marble steps. Müller's glance stole uneasily forwards, but soon calmed down again.

"Yes, the cloth's spread now. We have nearly three-quarters of an hour before us, I think." He turned off at an iron fence, stopped at a flight of steps where a basket and a milk-can stood, and threw himself down with a sigh of satisfaction, Riesenbach staring at him.

"They put out the can and the basket every evening, you see, so as not to have to get up early and shop, and then in the morning they find milk and bread there, like good little children when they get presents, but to-day they won't get any. Fall to!"

"But that's stealing! How d'you expect me . . . . My reputation . . . ."

"Stealing! Ach was! Fiddlesticks! Won't you take what life offers, or will you rather pine away

like another Echo till only your name is left, and a whispered 'von Riesenbach,' 'von Riesenbach' sounds from the blind alleys every time I break an excellent loaf like this? The sweetest little baker's girl comes here, with cheeks like tea-cakes, —I generally see her at a distance—as plump as Flora herself or Ceres or the studies of heads in *Gartenlaube,* and offers you the loveliest golden bread, and you remain hard and cold!"

His voice was so convincing, and he sat in such an attitude of unimpeachable right that Riesenbach felt he must give way.

Müller continued in a milder tone: "We are but birds, you know, picking up crumbs"—his mouth was dilated by an enormous piece—"I a great tit, and you a heraldic bird with two heads, that prevent each other from eating."

Riesenbach took the half-loaf gracefully offered him and ate in silence, not without uneasy glances at the windows. Müller politely pressed him to the contents of the can: "Take a drink, drink deep! Help yourself!—Drat that milkman! Didn't I think as much, when I saw his narrow gallows look? He puts water in the milk, the scoundrel, and we're expected to put up with it!—Here's a paper, too. The *Press,* I see. So they're Republicans in this house? Let's see if there's anything interesting in it."

He folded the newspaper with a voter's air of

authorized dignity, smiled like a pedagogue now and again at some clumsy phrase, seemed to find the whole thing boring, yet endured it good-naturedly. Riesenbach began to think aloud, tempted by the unwonted peace he felt to give expression to the thoughts that constantly oppressed him. He half indulged the hope that now he would be able to collect his ideas and justify himself to some extent in another's eyes.

"If only we could live our lives again," he began, "if only some one would help us! Don't you think we could rise again and be even better than before? One learns so much this way, if only misfortune didn't press one down. Oh, just give me a place and let me show you!"

Müller ironically puckered up his eyebrows. "What would you be? A magistrate?" He laid down the paper and shook himself. "Always the same things in them," he said cheerfully, "the same torrent of words, the abuse and insults that nobody means; at bottom they're so much alike, both parties. Their charges and defenses remind me of a rascal in a Danish comedy, who plays the part of two opposing lawyers in court, pleads into his own mouth, and finally boxes both his own ears. But let them go their way! Here we sit, the darlings of creation, our life a constant Sabbath! Then let the ox bellow in the well: we won't help him out! Unhappy, do you say? *Vála me Dios!*

Can there be anything more poetically free and splendid than our life here? Such golden sunshine slanting along the street, white marble steps to sit on—just like disguised little princes in the fairy-tales—and milk and bread! . . . . Milk and bread, and marble steps! What more has life to offer, unless it were a cigar, possibly? Inside that house they are sleeping and dreaming of money to buy a piano with, or else of how to get their fellow-citizens to elect them a 'city-wardsman,' while we enjoy the cream of life (somewhat diluted, certainly), invite ourselves to just a little of their breakfast, and leave them their whole heap of troubles both for lunch and supper."

His laughing countenance was merry as a sunrise against the red wall. Riesenbach at that moment felt a sincere admiration for him and was almost proud to be sitting on the same steps as he. Müller got up, stretched out the arm with the milk-can, and declaimed:

"See here! This last remnant of watered milk I offer upon this marble altar to the sun and to Delight. May she long thrive on the outskirts of this needlessly noisy world, may she not be altogether scared away by steam whistles, and may she now and again find her breakfast outside her sleeping fellow-citizens' gates. *Evoe! E-e-e* . . . . Look there! Now they're moving inside the house! I shouted too loud! Off with us, quick! I shouldn't

like to see their annoyance at losing the milk: it would have a disturbing effect upon my love of humankind."

A couple of streets away they parted. Müller broke off a sprig of flowering creeper and carried it between his lips, swaying unconcernedly in the sunshine. Riesenbach felt the tide of his good spirits ebb as quickly as it had risen, was ashamed at having had to flee, and stood looking after his comrade.

AMOR

[*AMOR*]

FROM BRILJANTSMYCKET, ETC.

1896

Amor

WHEN Christine first came to Mrs. Asplund, both of them thought it was by the direct interposition of Providence that she had been sent there, with a Registry Office, as it happened, for intermediary, and two slightly drunken men with a cart as a means of conveyance for her things.

And since the weather was fine that day, and her chest of drawers was got through the door without accident, Christine regarded that too as a sign of especial grace, and sat down to weep out of gratitude and a mildly oppressive feeling that she had not deserved all this, but would strive her utmost to do so.

When a month had passed by, Mrs. Asplund was no longer so sure as to the powers that guided Christine's fate, for she had discovered in her an occasionally shameless appetite, but if only this defect of nature were held in check and their intercourse were attuned to its proper key by suitable severity, she was nevertheless tolerably well content with her servant, especially in contrast to the last shameless creature, who wore a hat with poppies in it and received letters addressed "Miss," and once, just before the cup of her iniquity overflowed, went for a walk on a Friday

evening. Christine, on the other hand, still continued to believe in the divine occasion of her coming, and felt her responsibility to be deep.

Certainly the old lady was a trial sometimes, but then, bless you, she was so old too, and lonely and sick, and Christine knew in her own case that if she had had any authority over any one, she herself might perhaps not always have been so very good-tempered. However, she had never been in that position, on the contrary it was always others that had exercised authority over her, and had moreover exercised it to some purpose. She would soon be forty, and would be so glad to think that she was to take root in that place and would never have to move, and the wages, too, were higher than usual, since she had to be something very like a nurse, and all things considered it must be regarded as an excellent place, especially when compared with the lot of those who had neither food nor bed. Christine often made such comparisons, and they never failed to comfort her as far as her own troubles were concerned, although they brought the tears to her eyes at the thought of all unhappy creatures.

In order to manage her mistress she further hit upon the plan of taking her humorously, which subtler, if not more humble, minds than Christine's have found to be the only possible way of circumventing the troubles of life.

She first applied her method by meeting all the old lady's squabbles with a broad smile and receiving her abuses as if they had been the witty inventions of a precocious child; but this met with no success, bringing upon her only sundry outspoken remarks concerning the expression of her face and an evident mistrust as to the condition of her brain. Then Christine in her need would find her reply by a singular inspiration, for it would never have occurred to her to bandy words for the pleasure of so doing, she being all humility and entirely without self-esteem or any belief in her own talents. And so it was without at all putting her soul into them, more as if they had been the reflections of a third person, that she made her contributions to the discussion. But this method succeeded quite well. The poor invalid liked being answered back and received from her disputes a sense of exhilaration such as she might have derived from a bout with the foils: even her rheumatism was improved by them.

Their days usually passed in the following manner.

When Christine came in about eight o'clock—having reveled in her independence for a couple of hours previously, busying herself with lighter duties and singing into cupboards, in extremely subdued tones, just before she closed their doors—she saw at first nothing of her mistress. For

Mrs. Asplund, to protect herself from draughts, had fenced herself about with six open umbrellas, three on each side, and the wide four-poster consequently looked almost like part of an ancient galley with its garland of shields. Christine, of course, did not know this, but she was none the less seized with a feeling of more than common respect every time she came in, and it was never without a certain trepidation that she moved the topmost umbrella away towards the inner wall. And there the old woman lay. Christine could not distinguish much of her, but she heard her complaints rising feebly out of the dark abyss. Not a wink had she slept, not one wink, while on the other hand she, Christine, had been snoring in a shameless fashion. Nobody could understand what she suffered, least of all she, Christine, who generally speaking understood nothing at all, and went about like an elephant (although, without deserving it, she had been given felt slippers for Christmas) and could now only be prevented from breaking the lamp-glass by the last poor act of strained vigilance on the part of a sick woman.

For Christine this had become a litany, which she in a certain way liked to hear, much as she enjoyed the Sunday poundings in church, which she took as a necessary culinary preparation for the life of eternity. She listened to it more as to music than to words with sense and truth in them,

and ended it by jokingly putting up the last umbrella as a defense and peeping over the edge. This never failed to amuse her mistress, and by making speedy use of the mood of the moment Christine could get permission to lift her up and begin her toilet. When, after a couple of hours, this was so far advanced that the old lady sat in her chair before the mirror, and the pains in the poor joints had subsided, the decisive battle of the day was fought out.

Christine had to comb her hair, and if she succeeded during this delicate proceeding in warding off the attacks, the day was saved. Before the mirror, too, with their reflections right in front of them within the wooden frame, they felt like four persons, and made every effort to show the wit and force demanded in so large a company.

Mrs. Asplund always began with something directly personal.

"You're as ugly as Satan," she said, vigorously threatening Christine's image with her chin, "your face is like a ball of wool, I can't bear to look at it"—and that was not a bad comparison either, her coarse and high complexion was not unlike red wool, especially with the lamplight coming sharply from beneath, and certainly her head was round. But neither had Christine herself any delusions as to her appearance, and therefore she was not offended but rather felt flattered that she

"looked" anything at all, and found the comparison with so large a ball of wool something quite opulent and not at all derogatory.

"Well, m'm," she would answer, in a childishly pouting tone, "some folks is so handsome that they gets proud, and it's only so as not to be proud that I've made myself so ugly. But if you like, ma'am, it can be different to-morrow, only then perhaps the lieutenants will come and take me away from you, and if I get too handsome they may make a mistake between us."

"You and your lieutenants! You'd hardly be allowed to brush their servant's servant's boots! But there we see what ideas and plans you've got in your head!"—the tone malicious, and every word with more teeth in it than one would have thought possible in so old a mouth, but at the same time enlivened at the idea of these sinful but delightful creatures, as dainty and as dangerous as crackers.

"That's not it, ma'am, it's because you carry on and snap like a horse that I think about lieutenants."

And so they would continue, till the old woman's narrow plaits were coiled up into a basket, topped on Sundays by a flaming rosette.

But sometimes also they would talk of serious things. Then Christine did not open her mouth, but listened with respect to what one of her bet-

ters had to say, one who had been taught and had gone to school, and at these times she felt warmly towards her mistress, especially when the latter began to talk about religion, as of course she always did.

They might begin with the wires over the yard, those strange hollow wires that the godless people of to-day had found out how to talk through, though they would never get her, Mrs. Asplund, to put her mouth to one of those treacherous boxes. "Think of the Judgment, Christine, how they'll be torn off, and what a tangle there will be!"

"Oh, dear!" Christine had never thought of that. "But since there *are* such things . . . . There'll be some remedy for that, too."

"Ah, the Judgment! Yes, yes, we aren't what we should be. I'm not very gentle sometimes—but when one suffers so! And you aren't what you should be either, Christine, though you are not ill!"

Oh, no, Christine knew that well enough, and she had had no schooling either! But there was nothing to say against her mistress, nothing at all!

"And think of eternity, Christine, think of eternity!"

Christine thought of eternity, or at least tried as honestly as any one else to do so, and the tears came into her eyes. She wished everybody so well,

and blushed to be concerned in anything so great.

"To sit by the throne of the Lamb—ah, frail creatures that we are! But we have such faith, Christine, and so . . . ."

Yes, certainly, Christine had faith, too, but she only desired a quite humble place, not exactly among the really blessed, some kind of a servant's place there also.

"Oh, but it isn't so up there, Christine, it isn't so, although it may seem strange; there's no difference there, if you only believe."

Christine believed, fully and firmly believed, and she thought that her mistress would be her joy and great protection there. But she said nothing of this, and had she done so she would have been met by politely modest objections. She was edified in her inmost heart far more than even on Sundays, for this she understood so well, she could feel it in her soul, and she was a long time drying her eyes in the kitchen afterwards.

Usually her mistress was there with her, wearing a cloak that she had lately had made, although she never went outside the door, because she felt it as a duty of state. It was very elegant, and had five shoulder-capes. Out in the kitchen she would have a finger in everything, partly to kill time, partly because she suspected Christine of carelessness, waste, or even actual dishonesty.

She kept so sharp an eye upon her that Christine

always felt as if the pins in her clothes had got out of place. Sometimes she had to hold the old lady up while she lectured by the hour on how things should be done, and as the day was long enough for a sick woman, there often came abuse and hard words, but Christine's temper was not spoiled; she felt quite at her ease amid it all and even grew a little stouter, and would have sung, when she was alone again in the evenings, if it could have been done noiselessly.

And so they might long have lived in all regularity as a notable example of authority in a mistress and submission in a servant, had not Fate, which exists but to make tragedies, amused herself by tearing asunder these bands also.

One Sunday evening, when twilight had come, Mrs. Asplund was dozing in her chair, having laid upon the closed lid of her sewing-basket a tract with the title "Whither art thou dancing?"—a question somewhat unnecessary in her case. Christine, meanwhile, was alone in the kitchen, under a shelf full of cups shining with their Sunday polish, when suddenly there was a sound of stumbling outside the door, and something fell against the latch. Christine realized that some one had hurt himself, and hastened to open. Outside in the fading light a slender stooping figure rose, holding his hands to his forehead, and he did not take them away to look when the ray of light

from the door fell upon him, so he must have hurt himself badly.

To Christine's frightened question he replied that certainly he had hurt himself a little, but it was nothing serious; he often ran into things, he said.

"Yes, it's so dark here in the twilight," said Christine.

Oh, that made no difference to him, for he was blind. And he took away his hands and stood there with a long red mark on his forehead and his clouded swimming eyes right opposite hers—oh, how sorry she felt for him, and what a blow he had given himself!

"Blind! Blind, poor fellow, are you blind? Come in and rest here. Quite blind, is it? Can't you see a bit here in the light?"

No, he could not, he said, and laughed that it should be so hard for her to understand how completely blind he was. As Christine always liked it when people laughed at her, so long as it was not done in evident malice, she was pleased now, too, and tried to be as nice as possible to the stranger. There was also something so helpless and childlike about him as he stood there with his poor vacant eyes, his mouth smiling so readily, as if every word granted him were a friendly gift.

He had a thin, light beard and smooth hair which was rather long. His slender figure had

also, when he sat, that upright, snail-like, balancing position which the blind get through groping about with hands outstretched, his arms lay curved along his sides, and the fingers met in his lap and danced and twined about each other as neatly as if every one of them could see and as regularly as if he were at work.

His name was Qvist, it came out in the course of conversation, and he had been living in the house for two or three days, in a room in the attic. He made a living—not a very good one but as good as could be expected—by basket-weaving, and did his own room and made his own bed and cooked for himself and never burnt himself in doing so, and seldom went out, though he could find his way anywhere very well.

But however could he find his way, when she, Christine, knocked into things when she went about if it was ever so little dark?

Oh, he could feel draughts from gateways and streets and squares, quite different draughts—sucking ones, cold ones, swift or whirling ones—and then there was the noise, he heard every part of it and understood whence it came. And of people he could feel something—the warmth or the fact that some one was there, and horses he took good care not to go near. But still it wasn't pleasant to go out. His only diversion was to calculate exactly where he was, and that was of course a

comfort, but nevertheless it was sometimes a tedious and anxious proceeding—and then never to feel or know anything of the objects he brushed past or listened to!

Christine sat looking at him, sniffing with emotion, her eyes almost as blind as his from sheer compassion. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Poor fellow!" —She had the greatest difficulty in restraining herself from throwing her rough, red arms around his neck and weeping with him and telling him about her own life, how hard it had been sometimes and how grateful she was now, and how gladly she would have given him her sight.

Then the conversation grew more cheerful again. The blind man had his room very nice now, everything was so tidy and spruce; only it was a pity no one came and saw it, really saw it, for he had only friends who were like himself. He could play the tin whistle, too, till his canary almost burst its throat in competition with him, and the time was not heavy, for he had such a blessed gift of sleeping long and soundly. His mood became cheerful, and he joked as far as was fitting with a new acquaintance—he had fallen down like that, he said, because he had wanted to peep in through the keyhole, he had heard there was such a pretty servant-girl there—and in the end they got quite merry and might have long continued so, had not the blind man contrived to

knock down a saucepan, in throwing back his head too recklessly as he laughed.

Then they heard from the inner chamber a groaning that might have given voice to the meditations of a whole ecclesiastical year upon the sinful depths of life. It was Mrs. Asplund, who had been awakened and with her rapid powers of combination had at once come to the conclusion that the house was on fire, and that she was doomed to be burnt alive while the heartless creature in the kitchen was running about the streets without even informing the police. Christine had to dismiss her visitor in haste, and hurry out to reassure her.

This was a matter that took some time, for hardly had one terror been driven away when another took its place. It was now a regular *roman d'intrigue* about some dangerous relative of Christine's, who with her consent had stolen one or more copper utensils and was now on the way to hide them in a cave, until they could be disposed of without danger and profligate feasts could be held with the money. Christine had to take her out into the kitchen so that she herself could count over every article, and even then only half succeeded in convincing her. The tranquillity of their life together had received a shock, and whatever Christine did, it was difficult to avoid having her action interpreted as fresh evidence that she was a serpent, who was concealing something.

And so she was, for the blind man sometimes came to see her, but only for short visits, just so as to rest before climbing his four flights of stairs. He would half sit upon the woodbin and did not say much, but only smiled so as to show all his teeth and gums, and listened with delight to the sound of her work and always thanked her when he went.

Christine was so moved at all this that she wished to do something for him, but really she would have been best pleased if he had not come, for the situation in regard to her mistress was becoming more and more critical.

Mrs. Asplund was perfectly clear in her own mind that her servant was keeping up a liaison, and with the quickness of imagination that always characterized this lady she had no difficulty in finding the man in question: it could be no other than an ex-artilleryman, who had lived in the house four years ago and had then once turned out to be drunk when carrying wood, and whom, though she had never heard of him since, she believed to be capable of any crime. And it was a little trying for Christine, when she had seen the poor blind man's helpless friendly smile disappear behind the yellow door, to be obliged to listen all the ensuing evening to dreadful insinuations and tales of the bestial savagery of men, and to direct questions (put in a fury of rage) as to whether she had

"that carrion" with her in the kitchen every night.

Yet Christine had not the heart to dismiss him, and so she had to take this, too, humorously, as far as it was possible to do so.

One Sunday night she even went up to his room: he was so anxious to show it to her.

It lay at the far end of a brick-walled passage, and was not large: there was only room for his clothes and the stove, on either side of the door, and the uncurtained window stared almost vacantly into one's face. The room had a curb roof on both sides, and on a hook in the middle hung a bird-cage of precisely the same shape. The bed? Oh, how pitiful and poor it was, in spite of all his clumsy efforts! Besides this there were only a few chairs, a washstand, and a table with unwieldy sheets of braille writing on it. He had a lamp lit, and felt busily with his hands to see if it was burning properly.

"Why, how nice everything is!" said Christine. "Real comfortable!"

He was so delighted at her praise that she would willingly have strained the truth a little further; he beamed with satisfaction and stroked every object he came at, even a poker, with an almost maternal gesture. "Yes, isn't it!" How pleasant it was that she had come, who could really see and properly appreciate how he managed! He had taken such pains to think out what would

be the best place for everything, and was so pleased that he had succeeded. He always tidied up so carefully, too. Nobody could suspect, could they, that there were osiers and a good many finished articles under the bed?

"No, indeed! And so you've lit the lamp for my sake, too?"

Oh, no, not at all! He always liked to have a light in the evenings, when he could afford it, and especially on Sundays.

"But do you see it, or know about it?"

"No, I don't see it at all, but I feel it, I know it's there. And then it shines outside, and people know there's some one living here. And then . . . . everybody does the same . . . . they are all glad when the lamp is lit or the fire, I have read, and I myself . . . . certainly I'm not always cheered by it, but I know I should be if I were like other people, and it's pleasant to think . . . . that the light is there. And then there's the bird, you see; it hops and hops about, and when I play it wakes up and is lively, just like in the daytime."

Christine saw it peeping out with its little black, shining, seed-like eyes. She did not know why that should be so sad a sight here, but she could hardly keep from crying out in sympathy.

But she soon felt better, for Qvist was not sad at all. On the contrary, in his gentle and humble fashion the poor fellow was delighted, and showed

her everything, his kitchen utensils, a bead-embroidered cushion, which was so funny to feel and was so lovely, he had heard, with quite blue roses, as blue as the sky in warm weather, and red and green leaves—and it really was uncommonly pretty, Christine thought also.

He chatted merrily about his work, so interesting sometimes, when there were more difficult matters to work out and combine neatly, and about his family, which was not really his, for he was a foster-child, but which had been very kind to him.

Finally at Christine's invitation he took down his whistle and began to play. Oh, how merry the tune was, how light and free! Christine did not know what it was called, and it might have been pleasant to know, but she would not interrupt him, and soon forgot all about it, merely listening and watching how the smile flitted about his mouth and his fingers danced and his eyes danced with them, swimming and bright.

So very happy and fresh it sounded! It *saw,* that tune of his! It knew everything, it swung around swiftly and surely, caressing, laughing, comforting with words of cheer. She, poor creature, knew not what she felt, but it was all so gentle and pleasant, and everything was friendly, and perhaps there was nothing stern and hard in the world, everything was good if one looked at

it as one ought. And the bird, too, began to chirrup, such a funny little bird!

The room was really quite cosy, like a box over one's head, small though it was with its sloping roof. She said not a word as long as he was able and willing to play, but only listened with delight, and the time certainly went too fast for his clumsy old silver watch on the wall to keep up with it.

At last the music became as it were troubled, uneasy. He broke off short, and his hands fumbled aimlessly. Then he burst out:

Could she care for him, would she marry him, no one had ever loved him, they could manage it with a little help, of that she need have no fear—would she care for him, love him, poor lonely fellow as he was, he loved her so, he was certain she was beautiful, he did not know how he looked himself, but he loved her so.

It came so unexpectedly that before Christine knew where she was she found herself plunged into the noisiest tempest of tears. She could not for the life of her have said why, whether because it was sad to hear this question from a blind man, when she had lived so long past the time for such things and had never heard it before, whether she regretted that she herself was not young and pretty and that he . . . . Oh, no, it was not that, not that at all! She wept because she felt within her breast something so unusual, so disturbingly

new, and could not tell where it would lead. And she had really no other experience of emotion than sorrow, could not find any expression for it but tears; she was not made that way. But she was not in the least in despair and did not really mind crying, only it was provoking not to be able to control it but to have to simply howl as she was doing, so that she frightened herself. But Qvist was absolutely terrified. What was he to think, poor fellow? So at last she had to stop.

"Was she *too* angry with him?"

"Oh, no, no!" The tears seemed on the point of breaking out again, worse than ever. "No, certainly not!"

"Did she think, then . . . .?" He turned quite pale and stretched out his hands for information.

"Yes, she thought . . . ." Ah, those poor dear hands, that were round her at once!—"Yes, indeed, she loved him, if he loved her, and even in any case."—And not many more words were spoken, but there was much crying and laughing too. And the time, the time! Oh, that stupid clock!

But when the tears were at last convinced of their own foolishness, and she was no longer anything but happy, she became embarrassed again and felt much as if she had had on a wonderful fine new dress, and could not tell how it suited her. She put on clumsy school-girl airs and was not a little

affected, but this was only on the surface, and it did not matter, for Qvist could not see it.

"Did he really think her pretty?"

"Yes, wasn't she? So good and kind as she was? She must be pretty."

Pretty! She had to laugh at the idea, but did so very quietly. If it was a silly notion it was none the less a pleasant one, and certainly she would be kind, so that if what people said were true, she would not be so ugly, either. She said, therefore, somewhat guardedly: "I'm not pretty at all, and I'm not young either, and there are perhaps different tastes about that as about everything else, but perhaps you wouldn't think me disagreeable, if you could see me."

"If he could see? No, no, he was sure he shouldn't think that, as sure as he was of anything."

And so that matter was dismissed.

But her mistress! Was it not wicked to think of leaving one so old, when God had given her such a good post with Mrs. Asplund and had so obviously fenced her round, to show that her place was there? All Christine's joy sank down, as though it had dropped out of her hands like porcelain and fell in pieces to the floor. Oh, dear! What would she do and what could she say when her mistress pointed out her black ingratitude, and how would everything go?

But Qvist objected mildly that her mistress could get another servant, and maybe it was as wicked to grieve him as to vex Mrs. Asplund, perhaps he was just as lonely and helpless. And perhaps God meant one to be a little happy, too, as far as one could.

This reassured Christine, especially the excellent idea about the new servant, and they managed to find plenty to talk about during the short time that was left before she had to go.

As he came downstairs with her, she realized well enough how foolish this would look to others, and she heard the censure of the world, clothed in her mistress' deferential voice; but it never occurred to her that what she had done could be undone, and she regretted nothing. She was happy and had a right to be so, since she did not get in any one's way, though she was no longer young and was really, when she thought carefully about it, anything but handsome, and though he was blind and they might have a hard enough job to make ends meet.

And she would like to see any one who would say anything bad about him when he came to visit her, even if it were Mrs. Asplund herself.

However, she was prudent enough not to wish to run the risk that evening, and so she said goodbye to him outside the door and went in to meet Mrs. Asplund's now chronic mistrust. And this

time it was worse than ever, for Christine's red face was not of the kind to let tears come and go and leave no traces, so that her mistress was more firmly convinced than ever that the innocent artilleryman was a scoundrel and Christine a silly goose. But since she needed Christine and hoped that this nuisance would soon pass over, seeing that it was a person of mature age she had with her, she aired her convictions in much the same vaguely menacing words as usual, and grew calmer when Christine nevertheless remained happy and sensible, and went to rest not much disturbed, except for this rheumatism.

She suspected nothing of that which threatened her and would moreover never have believed in such a piece of folly. Fortunately, she did not happen to look out of the window.

Out there the blind man was walking, too happy to be contained beneath his sloping roof, with the night above him and the stars, which he knew existed up there and were so lovely, people said. He threw back his head that he might turn his radiant face and his dead eyes towards the window where he knew there was a light burning and she who loved him was looking out—who loved him in spite of all, just as he was, and dreamed like him about the wished-for hour, in spite of all, and however it might look.

CARNEOLA

[*CARNEOLA*]

FROM PURPUR

1895

Carneola

THIS is the tale of how Raymond Lully became the man whose fame was spread throughout Christendom with a grandeur that made men marvel, the hermit to whom travelers came from far, asking of him advice to heal the wounds of their souls—and they stood there amazed beneath the death-like calm of his eyes, half trembling at the dimly divined riddle of his being, half pitying—contemptuously pitying—his voluntary poverty. This is the tale as it painted itself to Raymond in the waking visions of the night, ere he had lived many years as a hermit, the tale as it burned on the not yet extinguished pyre of suffering, with the color of roses caught by flame, with an odor of incense and black earth, with a sound of weeping and deep, panting words, and behind it all the steel-blue cold and the star-spangled spaces of heaven. It is also the tale of a woman.

Carneola was her name, and the glance of her eyes had in it something of dark butterflies flitting over colored joy; her lips, when she ceased to speak, never closed entirely, but quivered as over some word held back, a word that would have turned laughter into weeping; her slender hands

she was wont to keep folded and at rest, and they shone bluish white against the purple velvet on her bosom.

She wore a dress with the underslip fitting close to her finely curved neck, though such was no longer the custom; the outer part left her sides free, with the graceful lines of waist and hips, and was caught over her breast by a brooch with a red stone in it, which sparkled in the light like a drop of blood from the Holy Grail. Over her head she wore a dark kerchief, striped with gold, glistening where the coiled hair raised its arch, and stealing away in folds close to her cheek.

Round about her shone and smiled the sunniest mirth of the little kingdom of Majorca—mirth that stared idly at the blue heavens through trees whose leafy tops seemed still to bear the impress of the inviting gesture made by the Creator's hand, or that drowsed peacefully within high garden walls, so white and warm with sunshine that the wind, circling too near them, was whirled up and scattered like smoke over the flowering runners on the coping. Behind, the round towers of the palace stretched forth their watchful heads with the pointed caps upon them, looking out over the light blue satin of the sea; but otherwise it was an angular medley of decorated doors and cornices that took on the color of old gold in the mid-day sunshine, a palace such as some giant's

child might have built of shells and glittering fragments, as he played by the seashore.

And they played inside that building. The music of zithers clung like a ring of bursting bubbles about heads that were ever bending together in merriment and whispered confidences. The golden balls of the jugglers seemed the proper measures of the time, as they rose and fell and were tossed up again by dextrous hands. When the wind sometimes increased in strength and pressed his puffing lips against the walls, it was only in playful menace, as though to warn them: Stay in there, children, warm yourselves in one another's looks, press each other's hands and stay! Stay in there!

There was no foe to war against on the islands, nor any game to hunt. Yet they must have their falcons like other folk, and so they taught the birds to strike at bats that had been frightened from their crannies and that darted forward, blinded by the light, with turns as sharp as the curve of a whip; or they let out pigeons and took pleasure in seeing their pink feet pressed close to their bodies, the soft wings as they caressed the air, and the blue shadows on the ground when the birds sought the shelter of the aviaries. Or else they suffered themselves to be snared in the toils of love, and enmeshed in flying or captured dreams, in alternating little griefs and triumphs, just as they also delighted in the artfully inter-

woven rhymes of their songs, with here and there a note of pleasant melancholy.

And so one night Raymond became enamored of Carneola, having grown weary of his latest mistress' walk. It was a thought too bustling and too heavy, and never could her figure show that repose of line which can unite the expectant joy of the whole landscape into one image, carving it against a gold-streaked sky under the careless folds of the dress.

But Carneola stood just so, leaning against the balusters of a staircase; where Raymond sat, a little distance from her foot, he saw her cheek with its amber-colored shadows and the lovely fall of the kerchief standing out sharply against the margin of an orange sunset, fading into icy green, and he could not comprehend how he had ever desired to look on aught but that dark veil, in which the golden threads gleamed dully, like the edge of a velvet butterfly.

Dark butterflies—now he understood the expression in her glance. Was it longing? No, it was too deep for longing. Was it sorrow? She had never murmured. Could it be perchance but a sense of loneliness, and the knowledge that among all this crowd of light-winged beings there was none whose soul could keep even flight with hers out over the purple sea of passion? But Raymond could do so. It was but for an hour that he had

joined the others at their sport: in his youth and newly won freedom from his books it had amused him to dance and feel the bonds fluttering about him. But there was other stuff in him, and now he clenched his fist and pressed it to the warm earth, and vowed that with that woman he would gaze upon the farthest horizon of delight.

She was young, though her husband had been dead several years, and none could understand why she still wore her widow's veil, for she could not have loved him so deeply. Nor could any one explain the coyness of her eyes, for where the laughter was merriest and all was at its gayest there she too was drawn, there her hand beckoned, and her voice was heard, but with a fragile cadence, as though her inward ear were listening for its echo. "She tries to strangle her conscience with silken bands," said some,—but what, then, could have set her conscience at strife? At the confessional the priest's blessing followed as closely upon the rustle of her garments when she knelt as the myrtle-branch recovers from the buffet of the wind, and none had ever seen a guilty blush upon her cheek or envy trembling about her mouth.

Raymond thought that he had guessed the riddle. Love it was that she was listening for, Love the mighty, the ascending flight of two twin beings through an ever brighter, purer atmosphere—and

none could say whose wings it was that bore them at this moment or at that—the drink of two red mouths dipped side by side into the spacious cup of joy. And he offered her his faith, his strength: it was not unattainably far, that she sought—seated close by her he said it, with his cheek touching her dark veil.

"Love is the miracle," said he; "only have faith, and there he stands in his unfathomable greatness, bending over your head. Have faith only, and your foot shall float still more lightly than now, for the wings are there already, folded up in that little pointed shoe. Only have faith, and all that you require in a man will blossom forth in me; already I hear the rustle of the palms above us."

She raised her folded hands a little, so that the fingers touched the clasp at her breast, and gently shook her head. "But Death is there," she murmured.

"And is that so sure? For us, as we are now? Nay, there is no Death. We know nought of him. If we love, Death cannot be, for then we know that death and pain lie deep beneath our feet, as far removed as a broken dream, within the ring of time, in that world which is not the real world."

Then Carneola's eyes flashed, and the red stone of her brooch threw a gleam upon her hand; it was as though her soul was filled with the clearness of the mystery, even as the darkness is tremu-

lously filled by the lightning flash. But anon the light vanished, and her fingers closed tight and painfully, as one in despair may close them.

"I believed just now in the miracle," she whispered, "but my eyes were drawn to the wounds and not the halo, and now I only see that *they* are real."

Raymond dared not catch her hand to him, although with mingled pain and exultation he felt that she was his, that she believed in him if not in love, or that it was her very love that made her suffer more. He could not grieve thereat, but he scanned her thoughts, scanned them impatiently yet sure of victory, and every morning the sun was shining on his pillow ere he slept, slept happy, with the great eventful day before him.

One night there was feasting at the palace, and they danced the torch dance.

The music was placed in darkness, and it was as though its tones took bodily shape and fluttered in among the gleams from the swinging lights. The halting joy of the violins, the wide wing-beats of the horns, the enticing melancholy of the flutes, and the drum's gruff exhortation all seemed to have hastened in among the tortuous ranks of the dancers and to have cried: "Fly, oh, fly! See, ever the draught doth choke the flame! This world is for time and change, for pain and longing, but we raise the curtain to another, the world of Love.

Fly, oh, fly with us!" Not long before, there had been as much light as a hundred wax candles could bear upon their heads, but now there were only flickering gleams of red upon crimson cheeks, lengthening shadows on dilated pupils. Raymond and Carneola clasped hands tight at every meeting and loosed their grasp almost in fear, and their hearts were lighter than ever, for they felt that the dance was teaching them wisdom, driving away all obstructing thoughts, and folding them together like frightened children, that they might afterwards meet the light with wide awake and smiling eyes.

Ere the music had yet sunk to rest, and as men began to bring in the lights, Carneola whispered in reply to Raymond's question: "Yea, take me! Never more to part! Let us fly from here!" In the brightening light he saw her eyes shine with joy, her mouth tremble with expectation; she seemed raised aloft by exultation, yet with despair still hanging heavy at her foot.

He left her and wandered through corridors and chambers with his blood dancing in time to the renewed strains of the music and an expanse of flaming light within his breast—then his sharp ear distinguished her step upon the stairs, and he caught her up when she had reached her chamber. There was a *prie-dieu* there with an image, and the light of a lamp shone over the red folds of

her skirt; otherwise there was no light save that of the moonbeams shining coldly through the colored glass of the window. He laid his forehead upon Carneola's knee and gave utterance to his ecstatic thoughts: "The miracle, the miracle!"—He pressed her hands against his eyes and reached up his arms, so that they enwrapped her slender form.—"Now your doubts are all hidden, shut away!"

Carneola inclined her mouth close to his hair.—"Yea, and even though Death were near us . . . . Are you sure of your miracle?"

Raymond lifted his eyes and shuddered at her questioning tone, but her love streamed down upon him with intoxicating force.

"Yea," said he firmly, "Love is all, the other is illusion. Love is joy, the same arm embracing both. The other stands outside, and never can come in."

Carneola pressed upon his forehead a kiss so hot that it burned like fever, then freed herself, rose tottering, and took a few steps forward towards the lamp. Her thoughts were strung to the point of delirium; she sang to the music which still danced alluringly in the distance. Then she broke off with half incomprehensible words, while her hands rose white and trembling to her breast, and she unclasped the brooch with the red stone, which glistened like a blood-drop as it fell.

"I believe, I believe in the miracle."—Her voice sounded thin, like the ringing of thin glass. She folded back the dress from her shapely curved neck, turned it back from her breast, and glanced downwards, as though expecting to see some ineffable, infinite deliverance. Then her face suddenly hardened in the desolation of despair, with the eyes gazing into remoteness and deep with the very depths of sorrow.

"See," she said—and Raymond saw, saw something frightful, corroding—"see what I bear!"

Raymond felt his head a blank, like the depths beneath his feet; grief, terror, infinite bitterness, and a sickening feeling of loathing made his brain whirl, but yet he heard her continue:

"I saw it coming years ago. I have cradled Death in my bosom. I would fain have cast him out and fled from him. I have prayed to God for miracles; I have tried to forget it out there; I have played, and I have laughed. It eat deeper and deeper in: constantly I felt it, ever saw it there. I loved you, love you still. I believed—I did not know—I felt it just now as a miracle. God is love, they say, and I thought—do you still believe in miracles, Raymond?"

Raymond bent his head. He felt the tears oppress him, tears and pity, and therewith something terribly cold.

"Our God is the God of afflictions, Carneola."

She spoke with the despairing wail of a child that fears the dark.

"I have known it, known it always, but it has frightened me, and I have fled from Him. I have frolicked like the others, and I have spoken with their words. I have believed them in my sleep—the whole has been a dream. This is the reality. Have not you a sore like this? Do not they all bear one, and is not that why they play music as they do? Hark! What weeping at the doors!"

Raymond dared not look up. He wept for all things, so it seemed to him, in weeping for her; she was too great for him to behold. Then she came close to him and moaned like a starving woman:

"Can you stay with me nevertheless, can you love me? I have yearned for your love. I shall not die yet. The loneliness makes me fear, and I was so happy but now. Without love I cannot live."

But Raymond felt the emotion that had lately filled him to be so little now, so trampled under the foot of the inevitable, that, even had he been able, he would have had no wish to raise it. As a boy, when he had found wounded birds, he had felt just so, though not so strongly. He had not wished to look at them, but had hastened to give them their death blow.

"I can weep with you," he said gently.

Like cold steel laid against an aching forehead,

his accents brought her to herself. She covered her bosom and went towards the door, beckoning him to follow.

"Farewell," she said, with something of her wonted proud beauty in the gesture with which she gave him her hand to kiss, and her eyes drew his gaze into dark expanses, greater than he had ever guessed at.

From outside the music floated in to meet them. They smiled mournfully upon each other, and thus it was, with that smile about the quivering of her mouth and the dark butterflies of her look drowning in a sea of sorrow, that Carneola's image came before Raymond's eyes every time her name was mentioned, every time he thought upon a woman.

* * * * * *

He never saw her more, never inquired about her fate; that same night he left behind him the dully gleaming lights of Majorca and held his course towards the steel-blue void of sea and sky.

He understood all, he had seen through the deceitfulness of joy and beauty, he had tried to caress life, and she had faded like a shadow in his grasp, but great and endless was the pain.

It was Truth alone, the voice of the Godhead, that did not lie—and lo! was it not but terror from men's fables and traditions that had caused her to

be shunned? Did she not bear about her the beauty of the open spaces?

Pain, that was the drop sprinkled upon Nature's breast, to accustom the wailing child to snatch his mouth away, that he might eagerly receive the food of the soul and grow strong for the life of eternity.

Vain was it to grope for love or pity here below, to turn the inquiring cry of the human heart into the promise of divinity. When the fledgeling stretches his downy head over the edge of the nest, and sees, below the blue vault which hitherto has been his only world, an earth lying blazing in the sunlight, he knows not that at that moment there is breaking from its shell the hawk which shall grow strong and wild beneath its mother's speckled breast, and shall one day silence the chirp of terror in his throat.

When the youth, from the dreams and pure air of boyhood's world, looks down upon life that tempts him, already the disaster is in motion which shall meet his forehead like a stone from a sling. For infinitely far back goes the chain of events, from the limits of time the dark threads of sorrow wind in and out of all the motley patterns woven by the hands of Fate, and from the beginning of all it has been determined where and how they are to meet.

But outside all is God, is Truth, where all desire

and hope are quenched as sparks are quenched within the ocean, and the soul is conscious only of itself, for its greatness embraces the universe.

So Raymond passed within the cloister walls and turned to books and to the converse of holy men, if haply he might find whether there was any other that understood this, and he found eyes that sometimes sounded the depths of the calm which he was seeking, and words that seemed to resemble scattered echoes of his thoughts; but he shunned the churches that raised to heaven vaults as of upstretched arms and their hymns hot with desire.

And Raymond spoke few words, but his hand was ever ready to act; he never prayed, but all men knew that he was near God.

A HUMBLE TRAGEDY

[*EN SIMPEL TRAGEDI*]

FROM THANATOS

1900

A Humble Tragedy

IT WAS in the fore-cabin of a small steamboat, a tiny little room which, as though in an attempt at perspective, narrowed rapidly towards the stewardess' little box, and thus caused her pale, fat features, filling the background, to assume gigantic proportions and dominate the whole. The cabin was also dominated by the warm smell of a huge beefsteak in the middle of one of the long tables.

Behind the steak, compressed in pleasant ease between it and the cabin wall, sat a man of tanned and weather-beaten countenance, with a light beard, and a brown jersey underneath his buttoned jacket. He ate with slow conviction, sipping his glass of stout from time to time with evident enjoyment. He had previously opened the proceedings no less appreciatively by a dram, but had prudently stopped at one, and now sat in an agreeable glow watching the decanter as it passed over to a couple of men on the opposite table, who could not afford a dinner, but by repeated doses were cheating their hunger in a fashion whose consequences were easy to foresee.

The man's name was Janson, and so he was addressed by all who knew him. Of course he

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had a Christian name, too; there were even four of them to be found upon his birth certificate, and these, in earlier days, he was accustomed to repeat upon request, together with his age and the year upon which he was entering. At that time people called him by the first of these names, in conventional style. But he was now a man of thirty, independent, and even—thanks to his own efforts—quite well-to-do; his mother was dead and honorably buried—so that he ran no risk of ever being called anything but Janson, possibly with a more and more definite "Mr." to look forward to.

Janson had reason to-day for feeling more than usually well pleased with himself and almost everything. He had disposed of a load of hay, bought as a speculation, and had done his business like a man. He had not been able to avoid being impressed by his new acquaintances, the imposing head grooms, whose broad-backed and corpulent dignity was already beginning to be reflected in his own bearing, but he had none the less defended his interests against them and was therefore necessarily impressed by his own cleverness also. He could not help building castles in the air as he sat, based on simple calculations with the aid of his fingers, and this made the food taste still better and drove the blood to his head, so that his thoughts became more bold than usual, and took on an almost disturbingly rapid motion. This re-

vealed itself partly in a humorous view of things about him, partly in a sense of power and self-confidence which filled out his jersey and made his own person a proportionately worthier object of contemplation. The comfort and elegance of the room, with its odor of food, took on a heightened value from the sound of the ice striking against the iron sides of the boat in the current, and from the foggy daylight that came in through the tiny round windows from the December cold and dampness outside.

He sat looking in friendly fashion at his two fellow-passengers opposite: they could not fail to inspire a sensible man with mild compassion. They were two young workmen, painters no doubt, to judge by their curly hair. It was clear that their prospects for the night in front of them were none too rosy; they would not be admitted into any room, but would have to sleep the sleep of the wronged and the despairing in some outhouse, supposing that they reached their destination at all. His own anticipations were very pleasant. Not only warmth and good cheer to be genteelly enjoyed, but also a little part to play, a seller deliberately to impose upon and render humble for the self-contemplation of the night and the business to follow in the morning.

The waitress also afforded material for dreams. Her name was Marie, and Janson thought her

very pleasing, though not quite as much so now as in the days when all thought of anything but a shy pleasantry, received at the best without reproof, was quite out of the question between him and a lady of her class. She had a stumpy figure, a round little body, full bosom, and a pale in-doors complexion, all of which were to his taste with the possible exception of the paleness, but this, too, he regarded in his altered circumstances as something to be appreciated as a sign of luxury and refinement, just as he himself ought now to prefer cigars to plug. Her faculties had been developed by her calling in two directions, mental arithmetic and repartee, and her somewhat tired face had thus assumed an expression of self-command and knowledge of the world, beneath which could be suspected character and the power to unbend in hours of recreation. Janson could not dream of marriage with her, even if his affections had not already been engaged, as he reminded himself in this connection—certainly not, but there might be a brief and slightly loose flirtation, not involving too much, half pleasure and half duty towards himself, with some of his youth still left and his bright prospects. He made preparations by pulling at his beard as he watched the girl's busy movements, but his thoughts could not succeed in following and slowly occupied themselves with the *penchant* already mentioned.

This was for a country girl named Augusta, not exactly what would be called a peasant girl, the daughter of parents well-to-do, solid, and respected. She had left home, though there was no need for her to do so, with a twofold end in view—to gain a living and at the same time further training as a dressmaker. Janson had known her for several years, respected her highly, admired her good sense and character and the clothes she made for herself, and was attracted by all this and other things, so that he could think calmly but warmly of a life spent at her side. He remembered now that the boat would have to pass her father's landing-stage, but on further consideration he saw but little likelihood that Augusta would be there or would have left for the country at all. Still less could he dwell upon the pleasant possibility that she might be on the boat going home. Certainly they had not put off yet, and he still heard people walking on the gangway over his head, but at this season she would no doubt be staying in Stockholm.

The two journeymen painters were curious fellows to look at and listen to, as he sat there after dinner in a position slightly raised above them. With their uncombed hair and spotted clothes they resembled tramps. They had no control over their bodies; they looked shy and found their surroundings too elegant. But they now began to be so merry that intimate conversation was no longer

an adequate means of expression for them. This was their first meeting, and they were to work together; for two young and enthusiastic natures thus discovering one another life readily took on the form of song—tenor, of course, as suited their profession and their curly hair.

They began very softly, and so far back in their throats that most of the sound could get no further: "And ne'er can we know—Brighter days here below—Than those which we live in the spring-tide of youth."

The stewardess coughed sharply, and the waitress pierced them with a look, but they knew nothing of it as they sought the depths of each other's eyes.

"What's yer name?" asked one of them; "Christian name, I mean."

"Johan Mauritz Evald."

"I'll call you Evald, then. Evald, we're going to be together."

"Well, of course I was christened Evald, too, but me real name's John."

"That's all the same to me. Evald, I'm going to call you. You're a good sort, Evald; we're going to be together. You know me, Evald; 'scuse my askin', don't you like me just a bit? My name's Charles."

"A bit! More'n a bit—no one could help it. How can you ask that, Charlie?"

Charles was deeply touched.

"It's a fine thing when people have tact and show themselves friendly," said he. "B— rare thing, too."

"Got a family, Evald?"

"How d'ye mean? If I'm married?"

"Oh, no—mother and dad, or only mother, I mean. I've got nobody, never have had." He bent forwards and drew with his finger on the table, in a kind of confused idea about a family tree.

Evald hesitated.

"Mine's alive," he said, "for all I know; at least she was last Christmas, when she broke her arm. But I ha'n't heard anything since."

"You're a lucky chap to have some one, Evald. Shake hands!" Evald did so, with emotion.

"Yes, perhaps you're right there," said he. "Of course I'm lucky."

But his comrade clutched his fingers convulsively.

"You, Evald, you know me; you know how I am. I've got a heart, but nobody cares about me, no young women, nobody at all."

Evald cared about him, and tried to make that clear.

"Yes, of course, you're my oldest and very best friend; but d'you think, for instance, that she over there . . . .?" He meant the waitress. Evald thought it not impossible. "Try," he said, "try!"

The drunken man stretched out his arm and caught the girl by the waist just as she went by. The face he turned up to her bore in its confusion an expression of helpless weakness, unqualified adoration, and shy delight that should have softened a stone.

"Marly," he said, with thickly blended r- and l-sounds, "Marly!"

But Marie was doubly insulted that this scene should take place in the respectable presence of a third person, and she tore herself away so violently that she almost pulled him off his chair. With a stranger close by! No more was needed to sink both the friends into the depths of despair, with their looks hanging upon each other's, and the cruel world left to look after itself behind their forsaken shoulders.

Janson watched them with a pleasant feeling that he was the protector of these foolish wanderers, and would let them work for him when he built himself a house and set up his own home—and meanwhile he digested his dinner and once more turned over in his mind the wealth of ideas that had come before him. Between himself and the girl there quite naturally arose a common feeling of superiority before these poor wretches; they smiled at one another and exchanged a few jesting words, and Janson could not but feel his satisfaction redoubled by the envy, subdued by admiration,

which stole towards him from the two whom none regarded.

Then he heard a trampling of many feet right above his head. He concluded that some heavy object was being brought on board, and interrupted his thoughts to wonder vaguely what it might be. A threshing-mill? No, it was too late in the year. A piano? Probably not, for who would have it, now that no gentlemen's families lived out of town any longer? It was some long object anyhow, to judge by the trampling, and certainly something fragile, too. He wondered if he ought to have a piano, in case he married—a second-hand one, not too dear—and whether it was possible that Augusta might find time and ability to learn to play on it, and by this means he was drawn away from his questioning. The boat put out, the journeymen painters wept over their memories and their solitariness, and Janson remained a little longer over his finished meal and his castles in the air. Then he rose, put off paying till later, since he thought it looked well to have an account here and meant to take a little more presently, and went up on deck to look about him, feeling satisfaction in the firmness and sureness of his steps on the companion-way.

It was gray and cold up there, the air gave an impression of blindness, the broken ice rattled against the bows. The passengers, simple folk

merely, sat huddled by the engines for the sake of the warmth, looking sluggishly at one another and saying nothing. Janson remembered the heavy thing that had been carried on board, glanced round in search of it but did not find it, and continued his walk on to the upper deck and looked around.

It was a trifle dismal; that was unavoidable. Gray and white and misty, the sky like tin-plate, the lake like lead, no movement in the water, only the furrow of the steamer and slowly eddying lumps of ice broken in pieces. No other color than the naked walls of the empty villas, and patches of red or green from upturned boats on the shores: the horizon cut off by the dark prickly line of the firs.

The captain, a squat little man who looked as if he had been cut off from below, was pacing up and down his tiny enclosure like a bear in a cage. Janson thought that he, as representing the upper classes on that boat, owed it to his position to speak to the captain, and he smiled and made a remark about the weather; but he got only short replies and therefore did not dare to offer the captain a drink, as he had at first intended, but withdrew somewhat shyly to the smoking-cabin and gave his order for coffee and punch.

He saw clearly that the waitress was impressed when she came up, and life at once took on its

rosy hue for him again. He turned in his woolen jersey at the wrists and buttoned his coat so as to look more like a gentleman, he called the girl by her Christian name and came near to inventing a little jest before she went. He enjoyed once more, and more intensely, all the thoughts with which he had been busy.

If, now, he became actually almost wealthy, should he get married at once or should he enjoy himself for a time with, for instance, Marie here? She evidently thought well of him; he was a fine-looking fellow with mustaches and a naturally pointed beard. He would be able to crack jokes if he had a little practice and got over the worst part. He would drink with the captain sooner or later; he ought to have a little fun like other folk. Augusta would be willing to wait, for she was a sensible girl and certainly did not long for the trials of marriage, though she would bear them in exemplary fashion when they did come. No one knew of their feeling for each other, and the words they had exchanged upon the subject were but few and simple, though clear enough since each felt sure of the other. She was a splendid girl and he a deuced fine fellow!

How he had made his way up—just think of it! He had starved, he had frozen, had known Christmases without a single candle, had begged credit for his mother from shop-keepers and been

refused, had got drunk on a glass of beer and wept for shame, had worked with ice forming round his wrists, had been beaten in the cold but without getting warmer. He had even taken communion in worn-out shoes, had lain sick and known that there would not be a penny for his funeral. Then matters had improved; he had been "converted" and had braced himself to a vivid consciousness of a responsibility that never loosed its hold, as also of the practical advantages of being respected by his fellow-men, he had felt himself a worm and a chosen vessel before the Almighty and an irreproachable man before all others. The religious impression had soon worn off, but he was what he was, a man of sense, who looked before he leaped, and knew how to make his own way. The coffee was good, the punch was good, and as he sat there in a glow his imagination took a swift and almost poetic flight, although it was occupied only with possible and even commonplace things. The future lay before him in the comfort and warmth of a home, and the wintry scene outside the windows, with its blind staring, its cold, and its powerless hostility, only served to sharpen the effect.

Janson would have liked to sing, but in the first place he supposed, from recent recollections, that this was forbidden, and then he had no voice and knew nothing but a couple of hymns from days

gone by, melancholy hymns that did not suit his present mood. So instead of singing he got up and walked about, since it was impossible for him to keep still; and in order to see people again, to show them his happiness and do something for them, he betook himself to the steerage.

There stood the two painters, having probably been turned out of the saloon, smiling sadly and cheerfully by turns at each other and the wall they stood by and at everything. There the country-people thawed in the warmth and comfort and exchanged a few words now and again. There the screw beat slowly and surely like a heart, driving the whole ship forwards with a muffled sound of ice and ice-cold water yielding to her passage.

Janson went over to the other side, where he had not been before, and his smiling glance met two faces that seemed familiar to him. Augusta's parents—what a happy chance! Now he could get some news—and beside them a long object, evidently that which he had wondered about. He determined to find out also what it was, and became as happy as a child at his meeting with these two, which as it were brought him nearer to the object of his thoughts.

He went up to them and greeted them warmly, but they turned curiously reserved looks upon him. Did they not recognize him? "It's Janson," he said. "And how are you this lovely afternoon?"

But they did not laugh at the witticism, as they should have done: they silently stretched out their hands and greeted him modestly, conscientiously, and a trifle ceremoniously, as is the habit of their class—almost too ceremoniously, with an excess of stiffness and coldness in their hands.

Janson stared past them at the long object with a slight shock of uneasiness which he could not explain, and with heightened curiosity. Was it theirs? There was a tarpaulin over it: it was strangely narrow.

He turned his eyes from it towards their faces. They were even calmer than might have been expected, and indeed a trifle pallid.

"Been in to town, Erikson?" asked Janson, by way of opening a conversation, though there could be no doubt of the fact.

"Yes, we have."

"Then you've seen Augusta, I expect? How is she, and how's she getting on?"

Erikson slowly made ready to answer; it seemed to be uncommonly difficult for him. The wife's features were drawn into a curious grimace. Was she laughing? A queer sort of laughter! Janson's own smile stiffened as he met it.—No, she was crying, and she laid her coarsened fingers over her eyes while the tears trickled down between them. Then the husband said slowly: "Our girl, Augusta, she died the night afore last."

Janson was bereft of thought and feeling; he could only hear how the noise of the broken ice penetrated through the dull pulsations of the engines, which now became strangely slow with whole eternities between them. Was the boat going to stop? And he heard himself ask with a voice that took on the same heavy beat: "How? How did she die?"

The answer came circumstantially, with painful conscientiousness amid an enforced calm.

"At the hospital. We knew nothing about it, and then there came a telephone message that she was there. The day afore yesterday they sent me word that some one wanted to talk to me on the telephone. I come there and says 'Hallo!' 'Is it Augusta's father?' they ask at the other end. 'Yes,' says I, 'is it Augusta?' I thought perhaps that she had something real glad to tell me and so was joking with me. 'No, Augusta's in the hospital,' they say at the other end; 'she's ill.' It was the servant in the family that Augusta sewed for, and she didn't tell me anything, only talked a lot, as them girls do, and was in a hurry. So when we went in yesterday morning and came to the hospital and asked for her, the gentleman at the gate said that there was nobody there with that name, but we stopped there and couldn't understand how she could be well again and out already. Then some one else comes along and they look into papers. 'Oh,

yes,' says they, 'it's all right, Augusta Wilhelmina, age twenty-three,' and so forth, and we tries to get in. 'No,' says they, 'not this way: she died last night.' There we stood in the snow and didn't know what we were doing and got in other people's way and were pushed aside. But then they were kind to us and helped us to look after her."

And he went on to tell why she had gone there, for some internal complaint, and how she had been operated upon and died under the operation. He spoke without the slightest tone of lament and seemed only to be striving with his calm and hopeless look to reconstruct all the facts as they had presented themselves.

Janson dared not meet his eyes or notice the mother's tears. He looked at the tarpaulin behind them and again wondered absent-mindedly what it covered. Was the boat going to stop? The piston-rods moved at longer and longer intervals. They would soon be backing.

"And where is she now?" he asked, when all was silent. The wife let her fingers fall from her face, and her eyes blinded with tears were revealed in the gray light from the port-hole. She stretched out her hand towards the tarpaulin, groping wildly, then let it fall and arrested it in a despairing caress of the hard canvas. The husband spoke in subdued and hollow tones as before.

"She's there, our Augusta. We bought a coffin in David Bagare Street. It was ready, just the right size, and so we had her laid out at once." And he went on to tell what steps they had had to take to arrange this and what the coffin had cost—all the chilling misery of the *mise-en-scène* of death. They had nearly missed the boat, and what could they have done then?

Janson heard every word and also the beat of the engines—more rapid now, disturbingly rapid—but it was with a curious growing feeling that something had come in between, something had arisen between him and all this. What was it? It was grief, it was bitter cold from outside, it was despair that would fain cry out and strike—and now it was upon him.

He uttered a cry of anguish that was driven all over the boat and frightened all other sounds into silence. Behind him a circle of terrified faces gleamed like white patches in the twilight, with mouths open and eyes staring. The two journeymen painters clutched each other's hands like children in the dark; in the doorway of the fore cabin women's heads emerged from the gloom. He himself listened to his cry, did not understand it, and, undoing the buttons of his coat, he panted for breath.

"The coffin," he hissed, "the coffin? Was it that that came? Was that what I heard carried here?

Open it! Take away the tarpaulin, open it! I want to see her, I want to see her!"

The parents sat rigid before his look, which had become so terribly pale. Behind his back the circle of heads closed in more thickly; they began to think in a kind of common groping movement, seized by the same terror, but inarticulate yet. Was he out of his mind, sick, or only drunk? What was he talking about, and what cold feeling was it that swept down upon that narrow enclosed space?

His longing to see the dead girl seized him with unexpected force, he could not bear a refusal, he could have crawled on his knees and coaxed a hearing from them. His feeling for her, which had disappeared, suddenly blossomed out into passion, and he knew that it must always have been so, and yet he was weak as a child with all his violence. He seized the parents' hands, bent over them and spoke rapidly, but his distorted countenance frightened them and they hardly understood him.

"I loved her; let me see her, open the coffin! I loved her; we had settled that now this spring or some other spring—and now she is dead, dead! But I must see her, I tell you. I heard when she came. She trod so heavily over my head. I was thinking of nothing, here and there, as one does—as one does, oh, God!—and then she came. Show

me now that she is dead; I don't believe you. It was just here I saw her last. I stood like this, and she said good-bye, and laughed and gave me her hand, and how can it be, then . . . .? I must see her hands, I must see her hands—open the coffin, I say, or else I'll do it myself and lay myself down beside her."

They understood him at last, and shuddered and were terrified at the thought of the corpse. But behind him the circle had drawn still closer and had found words: "Let him have his way; he'll go out of his mind, else."

They obeyed. Still trembling, they rose, drew off the tarpaulin, and turned the half-inserted screws. He stood upright, rocking himself to and fro to subdue his inward cries. His gaze was fixed immovably upon the end of the coffin where the head must be. And then they raised the lid.

In the scanty, cold, gray light of the corner she was doubly cold and pale, the contracted and emaciated face seemed small and fragile, but took on an awful beauty and grandeur from the pain-filled peace of the mouth and the conquered suffering in the sunken eyes. But the most dreadful thing to see was the resting of the hands one against the other.

Janson had thought that he would touch them, seize them, kiss them, whisper to them and warm them: but now he dared not even look at them.

Instead, he placed his own hands together in the same way and wrung them as if in religious enthusiasm and in torment. Though he felt the present nearer and more real to him than ever, yet his consciousness was at the same time far away, several years back in his life, at the moment when he was being "converted." It was in a narrow room, as now, with the breath of many people panting in the ear, and many eyes staring at the same point, and slow thoughts gifted with wings, and cold and damp outside. He did not know whether they were words from that time that now rose to his lips once more.

"We poor mortals, what do we know? I have talked and laughed like others, I have thought about my own and believed that it was mine, and I have not heard how steps were drawing near, have not seen how hands already gripped it fast. I have built my house and stamped upon the bedrock and have said, 'It is mine!' But the mountain split to pieces under my feet, and I am falling in the sand and the water rises—soon all will come down, and the rafters will strike my head."

He ceased, for he found no more words. On that day he had had many, there had been a shiver of pleasure in it, something that had seized him by the hair and borne him aloft in a transport. But then the feeling was so common: his despair did not reach anything tangible, it came in a stream

from without and bore him with it. Now there was this poor rigid face, these hands . . . . And he continued, with short moaning sounds, half stifled with tears: "Augusta! Augusta! That you should come so, that we should meet like this! What did we know last time, what did we think, and what did I know just now?"

In the circle around him they began to understand what had happened; the women's tears began to flow, the men stared in silence at the floor. Only in the two young painters with their half-drunken susceptibilities did the otherwise self-contained pity express itself in action. They tottered up to the mourner, caught his hands, and inclined their poor muddled heads towards his own. He looked at them without astonishment and with no thought of shame, and with a friendly movement led them back; then the tears burst forth.

The dead girl's parents had also realized at last who it was they had before them; but the coffin-lid between their hands had entirely occupied them. They had only wondered in alarm whether they could get it on again. Now they saw that they could do so, and slowly, reverently, they hid their lost one from the eyes of all, spread out the tarpaulin again, and prepared a place between them for whenever he should choose to take it.

He did so quite soon, his composure was restored, and he began to talk with them.

There they sat and exchanged their memories, and beneath their restrained and mournful words the legend of the dead grew up, that legend which is perhaps more true than the reality, since all that is mean has vanished out of it—that echo of a human being's best voice, which is heard after all of us when regret is there to form it. They were no fine or subtle feelings and images that they conjured up, only barren commonplaces about duties performed, and good will, and gladness—so melancholy now—but a certain greatness came over them, as good as most other greatness, through the calm and dignity of their tones. And around them their fellow-passengers listened and followed the story, as much of it as they could hear, and believed every word and sat very still, conscious of the engine-beats as a kind of rhythm to the whole, and the noise of the breaking ice outside in the gathering darkness and the cold.

MELCHIOR

[*MELCHIOR*]

FROM THANATOS

1900

Melchior

HE WAS one of those beings who are not seldom to be met with in the country in some decayed gentleman's house, where the shutters are for the most part screwed on to the windows day and night and stare with their round eye-holes at the neglected grounds, on the watch for something unforeseen to turn up and direct the course of time backwards, against Nature's common laws. Since the passing of the happy sociable days when carriages or sledges would drive up in a circle round the middle flower-bed, and a superfluity of light and warmth streamed out through the gate in welcome towards the guests, the inmates of the place seem no longer to have any reason for their slumbering existence.

Inside, the house looks deserted and unswept. On the faded tapestries are patches that have kept the original color, revealing the position of the more valuable pieces of furniture which have vanished. Those that remain, sofas and chairs in the empire style, painted in white lead, have become bluish and dark with age and cold, like thin and frozen hands. Here and there hang portraits of straight-backed individuals, whose confident bearing, even before the searching lens of the camera,

shows clearly that they never dreamt of the possibility of hanging here one day, soiled by famishing flies, while their readily repeated titles strive in vain to shed a parting glory upon the family.

The present owner (only apparent owner) seems to be as much a product of the decline of the house as that decline is of himself: there is a suggestion of decaying timber about his person. Through indolence or incapacity he has lost all chance of keeping his position within his own class or gaining a footing in another, and it is as impossible for him to re-establish himself as for the building to renovate itself unaided.

If the house, as was the case with Melchior's, is situated very far north, where it has always been a little exotic, the cold and the years take a much firmer hold upon it, the snow presses down upon its back, the storm tears away the pantiles, everything proceeds more rapidly and dismally than elsewhere. Melchior's establishment had in a few years been rendered in a great measure helpless, like a paralytic body; its life remained only in the immediate neighborhood of the kitchen, reduced to the lowest functions. And with Melchior himself it was little better.

Not that he had ever been good for very much more, but as long as circumstances had held him up, nobody had noticed it.

He had had some schooling, which he had duly

forgotten, but which had at any rate left behind it the Latin dictionary placed in a conspicuous position on his book-shelf, and the power to pronounce foreign words in an educated fashion without being afraid of them. He could make daughters of families laugh at almost the same jokes as the serving-maids, but with suitably adapted tones. He could ride a horse and shoot a hare and talk sensibly enough in business, however it might be when he came to practice. So he could take his place in the life of society, and this he did.

He had thoroughly enjoyed himself.

Nobody had waited for dinners with frock-coat buttoned tighter, rubbing his hands before the hostess and concealing under a friendly smile the appetite induced by the long drive. Nobody had with greater restraint attended to the word of command for the schnapps or more enthusiastically settled down to the *smörgåsbord*. Nobody had with deeper respect bowed and stared over the toasts. Losses and abuse at the card-table no one had taken more lightly. None had drunk punch more devotedly and honorably, with an ever greater appreciation of every fresh glass, or laughed more heartily at the coarsest well-worn stories. Nobody had gone home in such a glow of gratitude towards the whole world, so benevolently philosophizing beneath the stars and the glowing stump of a cigar. And nobody, as long

as it was possible, had been more ready to impart to others the same privileges and the same joy.

But the world had changed without any obviously sufficient cause. Troubles began to wait at the doors and did not stop there either. Soon they were sitting in Melchior's most comfortable chairs, and when they went out, admitting others in their passing, they took away the chairs with them. His house grew very bare about him, and the inexplicable nature of the proceeding made it all the more distressing. It was as though a conjurer had jestingly undertaken to show how all Melchior's possessions could be contained in his top-hat, and then by cramming it down over his head had convinced him that in any case the hat was empty into the bargain.

Melchior did not take it seriously to heart. He was as he had always been, but others no longer took him for the same. Every one had suddenly become staid and sensible, and expected the same of him. The thing that most annoyed them now was his relation to Carolina, which to himself had previously seemed a quite innocent though no longer amusing joke. She was a servant-girl who had never seemed to him especially pretty, but with whom he had entered into an "intimate acquaintanceship," as the phrase went. The acquaintanceship soon seemed to him to be very much on the surface, since it ended by their not even wish-

ing each other "Good morning," but there she was, anyhow, and could not be reasoned away, and still less could the children, though as far as that went they too were almost like strangers to him. And it grew very dismal about him in his loneliness away up in a desolate valley, where the mountains ended and the sea-coast began.

All real social intercourse was over. High bailiffs, foresters, and even sheriffs' officers soon lived their worthy lives apart from him. At the inn, when it was possible, he formed occasional acquaintanceships with horse-buyers and county police, but at last he had no one at all, and fared really badly and was sometimes in want.

Yet both without and within he was still very much the same. He wished nobody any harm, he preferred to enjoy himself, above all he sought to avoid the labor of thinking and to be left in peace. It seemed to him that every one else, from the governor of the province right down to the house-cat or the bear in his cave, desired the same thing, and except in the case of the last-named he had always respected their desires. He held that a man was a man, whether he were counted among the damned or the blessed, and perhaps also independently of clothes and position, but that a man with a hundred thousand was a thousand times more of a man than one with a hundred. He had no doubts about the precepts of religion, but was

afraid they were unpractical, and if taken quite seriously would ruin, among other things, the farming that was already so embarrassed. But they need not be taken seriously, for in common with all exalted ideas, such as the talk about peerless and loyal men to which he had always listened with emotion, they had in them more of poetic than of literal truth. He believed that cleanliness was a virtue and water often cold to wash in, that untruth was a human failing and "lie" a very ugly word. As may be seen, his ideas, if not clearer than other people's, were just about as coherent.

Externally he still had a certain elegance remaining. His cap was of Alaska seal and could not become anything else, although the skin had to a great extent returned to the hidden recesses of Nature which it had unwillingly left: he could not help its fitting his head as if it had been new. His fur coat was well filled out by his figure; his legs and gait had once for all acquired the posture which comes from treading one's own soil and imagining that one is directing a piece of work. His eyes still had the alert look of his hunting days, and his heavy mouth hid its embarrassed smile under a mustache which the years might possibly have made gray, but not less manly.

He was nearing forty when his darkest days approached. All his property was represented by Carolina, who unfortunately could not be dis-

posed of, and his horse, Xanthos, to whom unfortunately the opposite applied. This was probably the object which above all others in life set Melchior's heart-strings vibrating most strongly. Pride, admiration, affection, any esthetic speculation of which he was capable—of all this Xanthos, with his trim feet and his short ears, his broad chest and narrow back, his thin mane and bushy tail, had been the centre. He had come to comprehend all the splendor that had otherwise vanished; he was the tiny hope that still remained in spite of everything. Hence the high-sounding name that was little in accord with Melchior's habits; for this horse's sake he had even discovered a reminiscence of school-learning left in the otherwise sufficiently empty crannies of his memory. He had bought the animal against his financial conscience and had kept it hitherto under a feigned idea that it was prudent and distinguished thus to bury his capital, but really with a chilling sense that if he once lost Xanthos, he himself would understand no more than others why his immortal soul should have chosen his particular existence as its view-point upon eternity.

But to this matters came, and by the middle of the winter he reluctantly arrived at the conclusion, aided by Carolina, that he must drive into the town, a distance of thirty miles or more, and sell the horse.

He was to have gone very early, but when he woke to a remembrance of what the day had in store for him, he drew the counterpane about his ears and swore in disgust, and was soon off into a warm and pleasant dream about the good old days. It seemed likely that there would be no journey at all.

But when Carolina had made herself sufficiently tender-footed by wandering about with a kind of bounding step of indignation and despair, she took the liberty of breaking into his dream. She had never been very good-looking, and her complexion, even when it was smooth and admired, had had that tendency to violet which the bitter climate easily gives. Now it burned hard and cold as the northern lights. She spoke with the curious use, peculiar to the district, of "one" as pronoun of address and "he" as indefinite pronoun: the former idiom gave an ironical color, even where that was not intended, and the latter stamped even a general observation with something aggressive and personal.

"Does one think," she cried, "that one can drone away out of this, too, that one can lie in bed and be his lordship for another day with not a penny in the house, and the wood unchopped, and the snow not shoveled off the path, even? Somebody else can bear one brat after brat, and stand up to the eyes in work, and one must be a fine gen-

tleman with his horse, and only that is fine and good enough for one! Starvation's generally the end of it, and perhaps that's what one would like, if only there's a fine horse for the funeral. Now I myself—and an eternal shame it is—have rubbed down the horse while one has been lying there snoozing, and perhaps I gave it a pinch or two, and now there's the choice between us."

Oh, if that were all, thought Melchior, as he compared her uncomfortably piercing look with the mild and shining eyes of his horse; oh, if that were all! But the incomprehensible world had forbidden in advance any reflections as to that possibility. What a man did not want, that he had to keep, and what he did care about, rascally horse-dealers took from him. He tried to shrug his shoulders at her ill-bred tone, but at once huddled them together for the cold, and felt himself entirely defenceless. He got up and dipped his face in water, complaining in one long groan that it was so bitterly cold and life was so hard to live. When he was dressed he looked out through the window, but met only his own face with its hanging mustaches against the shining darkness.

"It's early enough," he said; "why, it's still night! And perhaps I shan't need to go very far," he added, with a shudder at the thought; "perhaps I shall meet some one on the road, and then—why, the job will be done. Then I'll come home

before night in some other conveyance and bring money with me, and everything'll be all right."

It did not sound so cheerful as it should have done, but Carolina was magnanimous enough not to notice that. So he put on his well worn coat and cap and shivered in the cold and stamped manfully into his fur boots.

"You'll put me up some sandwiches for the journey," he suggested jauntily.

But Carolina answered, grim as Fate: "There's nothing to put up. One has oneself to thank—there'll be a few loaves left in the kitchen."

Melchior swore at her lack of delicacy, but silently, so that only his mustache trembled. He felt a respectful pity for himself, and when he was alone in the room he stole softly to the pantry and took a handful of ginger-nuts, the only delicacy in the house.

"I'll bring home a whole lot instead," he thought, "I won't forget it"—and he made a gesture of refusal towards the bread, as he went out to harness the horse.

It was bitterly cold doing it, everything tried to slip out of his fingers. Melchior endeavored to put into his manner as much of his usual cheerfulness as he could, so that the horse should not suspect anything. But when he sat in the sledge with the elkskin rug hiding its old and leaky condition, and looked at Xanthos and stretched him-

self out, he felt with satisfaction that the whole affair looked quite imposing as he cracked his whip at the door.

Carolina thought so, too. Her afflicted woman's heart softened, and in a humble reflection that perhaps she had done them both wrong, she tried to smile at driver and steed and showed the children what a father they still had, and what a horse he could call his own.

Melchior was glad to get away from his wretchedness: his errand did not present itself to his mind just then. He once more cracked his whip for the encouragement of the onlookers, threw his head smartly back, and off he went.

Dawn had come now. The stars twinkled palely in the cold, and the fir-tops ate sharply into the falling white moon. At the gate the hoar-frost fell from the rowans and powdered his coat with the finest silver, while waxwings, as gorgeous as parrots, let go the red berries and chattered after Melchior as he drove by.

He thought of the old days, when he was setting off to school. To-day, as then, the excitement that belongs to the beginning of a journey predominated, and entirely hid the goal.

So Melchior drove along by woods and fells and bogs, where the wind whistled in the slanting black pines and drew the snow after it like eddying smoke. He sat cheerful and light-hearted with his

cheek against the soft sealskin and enjoyed the jingle of the sleigh-bells and the sight of Xanthos' trim little feet dancing. He did not think much, Melchior could not do that, but the keenness of the air and the swaying motion cleared his brain, and filled it with a kind of idea that everything that was bright and happy in his present life was passing out with him to liberty, that he and Xanthos were in some way bound together and need not be ashamed before any one, that they two would take their pleasure and were deuced fine fellows, both of them, with the world open before them. It even vaguely suggested itself to him that the soul which he like other people was supposed to have was specially connected with Xanthos, and he was glad to feel it released. And as he had grown accustomed to talking to himself or to the horse, since friends had disappeared more and more, he called out now and again in the direction of the animal's sagaciously twitching ears.

"Xanthos, old boy," he said, "we've come out of it well, you and I; we left the old woman and the brats and their noise, and now we're going to enjoy ourselves. One takes those things upon oneself, Xanthos, but one is not bound forever all the same, one can always go away. It was getting too hard for us at home, we were getting old there, and so we said good-bye. It's a fine thing

to travel when one is young, Xanthos, and look, what lovely weather we're going to have!"

It was broad day now, and as light as it could be so far north. The clouds, which had been carded together into a single blanket, now parted, and the morning sky appeared, clear and green and cold, while against it, with their tops high in the clouds, the mountains lay so bright and icy that Melchior cringed with cold as he went by. But soon they were behind him, the way became open, the rising of the road over the hills gave an impression of driving into the pale expanse, and everything was forgotten in the mere speed.

A peasant with downtrodden pointed shoes (himself no less shrunken than they) and a frozen drop on the end of his red nose, respectfully swung open a gate; Melchior nodded his patronage to the value of at least a krona and went on even more cheerfully than before, through the village and past the school-house, where the children stopped fighting to stare after him.

"We won't stay here among the peasants, Xanthos," said Melchior; "we'll cross the river first of all."

It narrowed here to a waterfall. The banks contracted in steep slopes of snow and pine woods, everything as hard and cold as stone. Most of the eddies were frozen over now, but in the middle, between ice-coated boulders, could still be heard

a dull wild roar, and the spray rose up and turned into hoar-frost at once. The dark, slippery form of an otter was seen gliding into a hole down below; Melchior's hunting blood rose to his cheeks, his memory played around former triumphs, and he was surprised to see how lovely it was down there. But he had to drive on; he had enough to do to reach the place where the road led over the river, and all else was forgotten.

The ice had come loose at the edge as the river had sunk, and many travelers had passed before him and weighed it down, so that the water had oozed up and eaten into the surface. There was a regular lake to scramble down into from the high bank, and Xanthos stopped, uneasy and trembling. Behind this channel the covering of ice lay terribly broad and cold, and on the other side, far off, was another dark patch of wet. Here for the first time Melchior lost heart.

Xanthos could no longer manage by himself, for in that case they would both have stopped where they were. His master must jump out and lead him. The ferryman was not inclined for extra trouble, since he expected nothing for it: he stood at his door and grinned at them. Disconcerted, as he always was by ridicule, Melchior sprang out of the sledge and pretended to laugh and talk as they plunged in. Poor Xanthos, he went in up to his belly and the snow increased around his wet

feet! Poor Melchior, too, with his fur boots that kept the water in! The wind moaned and whistled about them in the wide open valley—and the same difficulties, only worse, at the other bank. Then they had to run and stumble along so as to get warm and knock the balls of ice from the poor horse's hoofs. Melchior swore, and all his light-heartedness from the beginning of the journey had vanished. He could no longer help remembering on what errand he had come. Even into the wretched sledge the water had penetrated and had frozen; Melchior began to long for something warm. But he would have to pass by the inn, for he had gambling-debts of old standing there with the inn-keeper—could he without loss of self-respect come and ask for coffee on credit?

But he must get in somewhere and warm himself a moment, and he must see people and reassure himself. It was as though nothing existed except himself and Xanthos, and also a blind cold that came rushing upon them and demanded their lives, a white void craving to be filled, with what he did not know, but he had nothing to give it.

He stopped at a wretched little hovel, a hut of unbarked timber which he had scarcely noticed before, put on a friendly air, and walked in.

"Is there any coffee to be had here, mother, coffee without salt? A little coffee, at once? I'm in a hurry, you see."

The old woman was more wretched even than her cottage; she was clothed in rags. She had two daughters much like herself, with the ashen complexions of old women. The younger was blear-eyed and did not seem quite right in her head.

They all looked flattered, abashed, and hopeful, and tried their best to smile. Melchior had never seen anything so poverty-stricken, and he became terrified and oppressed that such things could be.—Coffee they had, but without salt? What was there to have with it, then? *They* had no sugar.

Melchior's spirits groaned within him. "Only coffee, then, mother. But something with it, perhaps? A little white bread?"

They all laughed at that. What did he take them for? How should they have white bread?—But the youngest girl did not laugh at all heartily.

Melchior congratulated himself that he had his ginger-nuts, and he broke bits out of them in his pocket and put them to his mouth as he waited. He was so hungry that these crumbs seemed to him ridiculous, and, besides, the feeble-minded girl was looking at him all the time and drawing nearer like a wild beast that has scented something. In a sudden impulse of soft-heartedness he gave her the whole handful—there! Good-bye to the ginger-nuts! Her face lit up and became like a

child's, but to show her delight she could do nothing but tramp up and down with her hands hanging, like a little bear dancing. Melchior drank his bitter coffee at a gulp and at once got up to go. They had expected a copper, and it grieved him that he had none to give. He only felt still more depressed by this poverty after his rest, and he shivered uneasily as he took his place in the sledge and drove on.

On past woods and bogs in long stretches, always the same scene. The woods were dark green and the bogs dark blue and brown where no snow lay on them, as for the most part it did, in great masses on the trees and great drifts on the marshes. Here and there, patches of dark frozen water shone like dully staring eyes. On the road two sledge-tracks of shining ice ran on before and drew him between them towards the inevitable, and the cold hummed and sang in the telegraph-wires.

"I shall have to put up at the next stopping-place," he thought. "There I must sell my soul, if I have luck and find a purchaser." But he dared not say anything to Xanthos, for fear he might understand.

Now the horse's hoofs thundered on the wooden bridge, and the inn lay before them, red and spacious and inviting. Melchior had known pleasant hours there before, but now the sight

was awful to see and drove the heart up into his tightened throat.

The ostler's grin of recognition must be sternly repressed.

"Hallo, there! I'm just looking in a minute, not stopping. My own horse. By the way, is there any of that cursed tribe of horse-dealers here? Tired of the horse, you know; should like another now."

"Yes, there's one, a proper 'un, big gold watch and wolfskin coat. Just goin' off now."

"What luck! We'd better follow our whim, then, I suppose." Melchior tottered up on his stiffened limbs, erect in figure and with a proudly embarrassed smile, found the man on the steps—an obnoxious, massive figure, wrapped up in fold upon fold of scarf over his pocket-book—and said what he had to say.

"That horse there?" answered the man, and took a bird's-eye view of it. "Well, let's have a look at him. Take him out and trot him round."

The cursed upstart! Melchior had never thought any one could be so ill-mannered and heartless. Well, needs must, since it was a question of business; he must restrain himself. Fumbling with his blue and trembling hands, he unharnessed the horse and brought him into the yard.

"Look alive, look alive! Let's have no butter-

fingers!" called the man. "Is he slow in the joints, eh, that horse? Can't he step it out and go?"

"Can't he just! He's trotted twenty miles at a stretch, but he's got as much spirit as ever." Melchior took a tickling grip on the bit and made the animal bridle up. Now, Xanthos, he thought, we must show them what you're made of. He cried and halloo'd and danced round with him faster and faster. Both horse and master were on their mettle: he could not entirely distinguish between them, and only remembered that this was a business matter and that some one was to be impressed. He was hardly conscious of his poor frozen feet or of the icicles hanging from his mustaches round his thin face. His body was jerked to and fro, and it was only by accident that he kept on his feet. Inwardly he was weeping and raging with pain and anxiety, but he tried to look as cheerful as possible, as though it were only from the sheer joy of living and an excess of energy that he was dancing about like this, and all kinds of shadowy recollections of circuses and other amusements crowded into his brain. In the end he himself believed that he was happy, although it felt so strange.

The dealer stood on the steps and cast his rapid professional glance over the animal, as also over its master, who had lost his cap and was whirling around like a straw. At length he came down and

deigned to say something—the brute! Melchior stopped to listen. There were many people round them now.

"An old horse," said the man, "turning gray already. Has he any teeth left?"

Melchior's anger strove with his anxiety.

"Gray, sir? You run yourself and get your skin full of frost! Old? He's no more old than I am."

"Well, well," said the man, appealing to the others with a broad grin, "that'll do, I reckon. You've both seen your best days, haven't you?" Laughter came rolling upon him from all sides and struck like whips.

Melchior felt as if he stood stripped and naked in the snow. What was he? A poor, worn-out devil dancing at a fair. What was he good for? Nothing. And he stifled his indignation under a humble laugh. "Ha, ha, a manner of speaking, sir! Xanthos is young enough, young and strong. I—well, I have been younger, but that's not the point just now. The horse is a good one: come and look at him."

The man did so, pressing his fingers roughly into the animal's mouth, as if he meant to break off its teeth. He looked critically at it, but that was only a pretense, for he knew well enough what it was worth.

"The price," he asked. "What had you—hm, thought?"

Melchior was anxious, as if he had had to guess a lucky number, but he straightened himself proudly. "Fifteen hundred I gave for him, didn't look twice at a krona then, but he's worth that and more. I'll sell him for eight, the sledge included, of course, the sledge included."

The man whistled.—"Sledge included? Much obliged"—and he turned on his heel. No doubt he meant to create an effect and thought that Melchior would run after him and catch him by the folds of his scarf. Not he! It hadn't yet come to that! With fellows of that sort one did not haggle or barter, either in buying or selling. One threw them their money or went one's way.

With a dignified bearing, though crimson with rage, he put in the horse again, drew on his mittens (still with dignity) and took his place in the sledge, in the hope of meeting better luck in the town. But since there was now no one left to impress, he sank together in weakness and terror for the long journey, and anxiety for the issue of it, whether it led to business or no. And so Melchior drove away.

On past woods and bogs and woods and bogs again, with here and there a field with drying-hurdles and fences weighted with snow. Thin and cold was the air, and tiring all this whiteness which merely slipped past but never disappeared. Sometimes snow fell, lightly and silently, as though the

day wished to blot out the little that still distinguished it from uniformity, and doze in peace; then it would stop, and the light would gleam out upon a still colder, almost inconceivable whiteness, and stare into Melchior's eyes. This happened as regularly as an infinitely prolonged blinking.

Melchior sat watching the horse's tired trot, and wondered why they were both alive. Perhaps he had been wrong in not giving way and knocking off a hundred or two.

"If I had, Xanthos," he thought, "we should be well off now; we could eat and drink, and with the money I could have bought something for us. Perhaps we weren't worth more, either; it's so easy to be mistaken in oneself. Others must know better, they know everything. It would have been nice to go home instead, warm and with full stomachs, and give you a feed from the new bag of oats to-night—oh, but, Xanthos, you wouldn't have been there then! A curse on this life, a curse on this cold—there's a stirring in the air above us: if it was dark, we should see the northern lights now, green and red, all the sky a flaming hell of cold. And Charles's Wagon would be rolling without horses along the ice of the Milky Way, and the stars would be staring at us: 'What are you doing here, and what sort of a game are you playing?'—You must be as hungry as me, poor

Xanthos, and worse: you have the load to draw. At the next inn we must put up, we must have something, whatever happens. Here we are already, Xanthos. Now look smart and lively, as they do at inns, so that folk shan't know what a fix we're in."

It was a tumble-down inn with dents in the walls on both sides of the stove, and windows broken in bouts of fisticuffs. In comparison with other straight-lined and orderly houses, the whole place seemed ruined by drunkenness. All the family inside drank, too, and a stout, hot-tempered serving-maid tried in vain to keep trade going.

Melchior was much afraid of her and cracked his whip loudly, so as to keep up his spirits.

"Here are tired and hungry travelers. Give us the best you've got!" The girl stood on the steps and looked him up and down.

"Asking is one thing and paying's another," was her answer. They had had business with each other before, and she would thank him to let her see a little money first.

Melchior beat his breast at the insult and thought the echo sounded manly and encouraging. Was that a welcome? Should he punish her by going away again? No, she was practically uneducated, and one must pass it over. He pushed her back with a seemly jest. "If it's surety you want, I suppose horse and man will be enough,

valued together—how many hundreds shall we say?"

This impressed the girl and she promised a warm meal. Xanthos was led to his measure of oats in the stable, and Melchior to the kitchen; he preferred this to the inn dining-room, for he wished to see people about him and be gracious and condescending. The old father and mother were sitting in apathy, staring into blue flames. Melchior roused them to a consciousness of each other and of the world, had wood put upon the fire, and was thawed and cheered by the warmth: he ordered brandy and treated the company, felt kindly towards them all, and was glad to be alive.

He chatted about his journey, his horse, and the state of his affairs: all were equally splendid. He boasted how he had taken it out of a horse-dealer who had forced himself upon him, he improvised meetings with persons of quality upon the road, he recovered his life as it had been in former days, though in a more imposing form. Everything had over it a glamour such as he had never before imagined; he clung to it anxiously and repeated his words, from a desire to keep himself here as long as possible. The drunken couple heard him with delight, they were glad to be able to understand what he said, and nodded and shook their heads in admiration.—"Now he must go into the town and amuse himself. It was a fine thing to get

away from home now and again. He was quite free, of course. But he must hurry away, before it got late."—They both agreed, envied him his pleasure, and never dreamed of pressing him to stay, as of course he ought not to do either.

Time passed, and he had to pay up and go. He felt in his trousers' pocket—he had forgotten his purse! He felt in his coat—his pocket-book too! Well, he could leave security, the skin from the sledge, for instance.

The girl gave him sour looks. She had been humbugged, but she would not take the rug from him.—"Humbugged? What are you talking about? Me to humbug people? Mind what you're saying! You can have the rug, I don't need it; haven't I got my coat, and aren't I as hot as fire?" —And he threw out the skin and went, not at all annoyed; he was still thinking delightedly what excellent folk they were and how he had enjoyed himself with them.

The weather was worse now and the short day was over. The air was a dirty gray in the twilight, with only the whirling of snow-flakes for a sky. Woods and bogs were still there, indeed, but there was little to be seen of them, only a dark glimpse of the woods, and nothing at all of the bogs, an entangling net of driving snow all round. Xanthos trotted along faster than ever, well fed and happy, and yet everything seemed motionless and un-

changed about them, as in some dream-journey. Melchior lay back and hardly troubled about the reins; he was tired and indulged his half-drunken fancies.

"It's a fine thing to travel when one is young, Xanthos; you and I, we're going in to town to amuse ourselves. There I'll buy you a velvet saddle-cloth, like grandfather had in the war. He was a man, if you like; he fought with the Russians. We youngsters used to play with the saddle-cloth; it had a wreath of great yellow topazes in silver, that shone like wolves' eyes. The wolves were around him, and there was a ring of shining points, two by two, but they didn't dare to come on, because the stones danced and shone as the horse galloped, and the beasts were afraid and howled in the cold, and were left behind. That's the thing to have to keep those beggars off, else they'll soon have you by the throat. You shall have one, Xanthos, you shall be fine. Your name's fine, too, Xanthos; it's Greek. It's the only thing I remember of all that I have learned; except for that I don't know so much more than you . . . .

"We go on and on, though we don't want to. Something drives us; we don't know where we're going. We think we know people and are friends and like them; but at the best they only sit and stare at you and wonder why you take up their time and drink their punch. It doesn't matter. Up

hill and down dale—it's fine to be rocked and feel the snow on you when you're warm, isn't it?"

The snow fell thicker and thicker; his coat was white and his cap white, and on beard and eyebrows great flakes collected. Melchior dozed off in agreeable fatigue.

He woke to feel his feet aching. "It's from that cursed river," he thought; "it'll pass off when we come to the town. If we only get there soon!"

The road bent sharply; on a hill a dull gleam flickered from a cottage window; close to the sledge lay a barn, as rounded and white as a cat.

"Hallo!" cried Melchior, "we must have reached the short cut, where the river goes. We've had enough of winding roads. Down there, Xanthos."

Xanthos dived into the ditch and out again, the snow breaking like water over his shoulders. "It'll soon be better," thought Melchior; "we must find the track soon." The snow whirled into the sledge and up against him. Melchior tried to bury his head in his collar, but the wind was blowing hard on one side, and the ice on his mustache increased till it became as big as his fist and weighed him down. He sat wondering if he had not been a fool to leave the rug behind, and a fool to turn off the main road, for the snow was still just as deep.

Suddenly the flakes ceased falling, the white whirl was swept away, and the sky was left clear

and dark, with a pale flaming over it. Melchior no longer knew whether he were awake or asleep, but it seemed to him that he had never seen a light so cold and hostile. He stopped the horse and waded up to it on his stiffened feet, with a vague feeling that he must consult with it, look into its eyes to see what he was to do, seek help and support from the only creature near him. He stared into the round, large orbs and was amazed that they had nothing to tell him, and the thought now first occurred to him that they must see quite differently from his, with everything made bigger by the stronger refraction of the pupils—gigantic, strange, and awful.

"There it is, Xanthos," he said, "there it is! We don't know the way, either of us, but we must try to get back, you must try." And he sat in the sledge again and let it go where it would.

But matters grew no different, except that their course slackened as the horse grew tired. Melchior, too, was tired, a strange numbness crept in from his scalp and lapped at his brain. Odd images and memories wakened; he spoke, but the words did not get far beyond his mustaches.

"Xanthos, Xanthos, where are we? You are Achilles's horse, and I am Achilles, but what was it that happened to him and what was it I came out for? I was well off with Carolina, she was good to me, she smiled at me when I left. And the world

was always queer; I never understood it. They stand there like horse-dealers and judge you, fat rascals with false aces of hearts in their breasts and nothing else; they stand on the steps and look at you: 'Will he do, or will he not?' Xanthos, you are good and you are handsome; you were always the best thing I had, and you're the only thing left now. All the time I felt a kind of pain inside me when I thought about this journey. You could speak before in the story, you warned Achilles then—why don't you say something now? You've got a star on your forehead and such kind, shining eyes —if you could look at me, Xanthos! I can't see you!"

Melchior tried to reach out towards his beautiful horse; he could not open his eyes, for the lids had frozen together. Groping like a blind man, he fell heavily forwards, while Xanthos, lost and weary and cold, with a dark wonder and fear before his dim intelligence, drew him on into the snow, which was lightly falling once more.

A SECRET IDYLL

[*HEMLIG IDYLL*]

FROM THANATOS

1900

A Secret Idyll

I

IN THE autumn of 1793 Jean Timoléon Goubin was employed as a scrivener in the little town of Mans.

His wages were six hundred francs a year; he had no one to care for nor any to rejoice over. He dined out once a day, and for the rest lived on dry bread, the crumbs of which he carefully blew away from his official papers and brushed out of his cravat with a contented yet melancholy feeling that he owed no man anything, and could honorably live the life that was his lot.

His three names furnished with a fair degree of completeness an index of his soul.

He had got the first from Rousseau, and with it a warm breath of all the hope and illusion that filled the time. The second came from Plutarch's Stoic hero. It had in it the coolness and the ring of bronze, and the desire for greatness which seemed now to have fled the world, and splendor from the flames of the pyre on the ruined stronghold of the Syracusan tyrants, lifting up the shade of the dead man high into the eternity of fame. The surname again fettered all this to earth, kept it enclosed within a poor man's well brushed coat,

took it to work in the mornings and home to bed in the evenings, preaching every day its calmly ironical lesson: This and this you have been set to do, a great task or a small, and great if all your strength goes to the doing of it.

And this it did: it was no time for slackness and indifference. This was the stern period of harvest, and all around was burning the worthless chaff from the scamped day labor of the centuries.

So he sat and copied with a penmanship that grew ever clearer and more faultless, less and less characteristic; he had a self-denying satisfaction in seeing it so. He tried to do more and more every day, and to make his extracts constantly clearer and more definite. When his fingers stiffened with the cold, and that happened often enough, for an oppressed country could no longer afford many fires for her children and servants, he rubbed his hands against each other and dreamed with head aloft.

In another and worse time he would have written verses, and in his poor but haughty isolation would with listening ears have wrapped himself about his own personality, heightening and chiseling out every peculiarity therein and building for it a pedestal out of a half despised, half longed for world. But now this never occurred to him, for the more he was rebuffed by men as individuals, by

what they had brought things to and were, the more he loved humankind as it was meant to be and should be. In a near future he saw all men thus, without crime, without sin, with simple, innocent hearts, and no sign of wear about them but in their hands, drawing in with quiet breath a joy of which there was as little to say as of pure and uncorrupted air. But over this idyll, as in an antique temple, rising upon steps of masonry above tilled fields and garden copses, he saw the great ones of the past, Plutarch's heroic figures, with long and measured steps, as befits dead men, mounting guard between the pillars and stooping down to welcome the newcomers who had made themselves worthy to attain their circle. That was the place for those on whose broad breasts the lightest breath of Joy herself rested too heavily, who wrapped the Nessus-shirt of suffering in proud folds about them, wearing it without a tremor and hardly deigning a glance at the bliss they thereby secured for others. It was there he longed to be.

He was only twenty-two years old and had shaped his ideal as well as he knew how.

About him, far and near, he saw men who believed themselves to be upon the way he sought to tread: in the France of the Terror there was no lack of self-devotion or of heroism. But for him, with his look accustomed to the pose that

only a heroic death can give—and that not at once, but in an enlarging of the figure through the ages—these living great ones could not be great enough for models, there was a lack of gravity about them. Unlike the blood of legend, which never soils and sullies the dagger or the sword, the blood that now ran red disgusted him, and he had no desire to increase its flow, however necessary were the shedding. He abode his time, till he should feel that this had come and could see the shadows beckon, and if it never came at all, that was better than losing his way in following it along gloomy paths. Meanwhile he did his duty, humble though it was, feeling his conscience clear, and smiling little and talking even less, and held himself very erect with his three names.

The civil war rolled against the town and back again, flooding the country with hatred and terror and defiance and suffering. Jean Timoléon observed it all with stoical calm and a feeling that now perhaps his testing-time was drawing near, and that if so he was ready to meet it.

Meanwhile he worked and wrote as fast as he could for the cold, and ate his dry bread and made his wretched couch in the evenings, so that—his greatest luxury—he might read himself to sleep by lamplight over his Plutarch, and sleeping dream not at all, as is fitting for him who is waiting for his fate.

II

One night he went home earlier than usual, for the day had been unquiet and often disturbed. The Vendean army, like a hunted animal, had hurled itself with the boldness of despair against Mans and the foe, and had met its fate outside the town. After a fierce and uncertain fight it had been crushed and, as the sun went down, scattered and whirled away like withered leaves towards the darkness and destruction. During the varying fortunes of the day there had been a constant stream of people to the *mairie* with their doubts, their lamentations, and their patriotic advice. Goubin had not been able to write much, but had had to practise his smile of calm and stoical confidence and even to speak unwilling words of encouragement or disapproval. But when the battle was over he made good the time he had lost, while the stillness spread about him as when storm-tossed water subsides and settles back into its place, when the pressure is weakened.

In the streets it was still far from quiet. Many of the insurgents had blindly and rashly taken refuge there, since there were objects to hide behind and shadows to cover them. They were hunted now by any who willed; no quarter was given, for they themselves had long since rooted that word out of the language. Cries and death-rattles sounded, rifle shots pierced the silence and

the darkness, and lit up for a flashing moment walls and corners that seemed to hang floating from the veil of night, pale faces that looked like feverish visions of terror and were snatched back into the darkness, as though they lacked reality, while the echo of the shot died away.

The lanterns of the patrols shed a dull gleam upon the metal parts of weapons and the buttons of uniforms; behind, all was an obscure mass of wandering shadows, out of which the soldiers' measured tramp and clatter sounded in curious contrast to the formless void. It was as though the darkness was fighting with itself in anguish, striving for life and shape, as though all the souls which had been sent to wander in the unknown had remained before closed doors like beggars driven out, mumbling their ineffectual prayers to be allowed to stay. One might have said that the mighty age itself, rich in destruction as also in new births, was lying tossing on its couch in delirium and creative dreams.

In the cold, damp air there came from the frost-bitten, sodden leaves of the gardens a smell of sweetish fermentation and of soil, which in some way suggested blood and made breathing heavy.

Goubin walked carefully in the middle of the street, fearing lest he should set his foot on something foul and slippery. He held his head erect

and took refuge in the Stoic world of his imagination, that he might not be frightened by the sights he saw around him.

"It will be good to shut it out," said he, "to lie in bed with the book and forget. To-morrow it will be gone, the sun will soon break through the mist and will shine only on deeds of valor. The world will once more be for the bright and the strong, the maples will still burn red, though they are thinning. All will be different then."

On an open square a dog joined him. It came with a feeble whine from the darkness, was afraid, prowled about, and came back again. It sniffed shyly at him and seemed thus with its dark instinct to be assuring itself that here was the protector it needed. It followed close behind him, started away at any movement, ran on in front and stopped, afraid of some unknown object, until he nearly stumbled over it. All the time it uttered the same gentle, appealing whine.

He belonged to the Vendeans, thought Goubin. Perhaps he has seen his master fall and was frightened by the stiffness of his limbs; and now all that was his light and providence is gone, and he underderstands nothing and is oppressed by the darkness.

It seemed to him the shyest and most helpless thing in all this helplessness and terror, and though he would not encourage it by a word, he let it fol-

low him, half convinced that he would not be able to help taking it in.

He will disturb me, he thought, and interrupt my reading; and I have hardly food to give him—but nothing is settled yet, and perhaps he will go away of himself.

But the dog did not do so; on the contrary, it drew its magic circle all the closer, so as to compel his sympathy.

When Goubin reached his door, the animal understood by the slackening of his footsteps that this was where he lived, and bounded in before him as if it had known the way.

There was a little light from a window on the other side of the street, and Goubin stopped to look at his companion.

It stood still, whining as before, wagging its tail and fawning on him, but with its attention distracted by something else behind it. The half-gate stood as usual lifted off its hinges and supported against the wall; in the space behind it something moved. Goubin put in his head to see what it was.

Huddled up in the damp and the dirt, like a rat hunted to exhaustion and awaiting the death-blow, a human form lay crouching, perfectly still now, with eyes fixed on his, perfectly silent, with breath caught in a last despairing hope of not being seen. The darkness scattered before his look and he saw that it was a woman.

He thought of passing on and taking no notice of her, going up to his book and his rest in a feeling that by so doing he was fulfilling her desire and showing his compassion. But his pity had been roused by the episode with the dog, and the infinitely desperate state of her position became clear to him. A refugee, of course, he thought. Sooner or later she will be discovered and killed. Even if the darkness and cold were all, I could not leave her thus.—And without reflecting, he whispered: "Come out and follow me!"

She obeyed him in silence, creeping out and rising to her feet. She was young and fragile, and in spite of the semi-darkness he could see that her wet and shapeless clothes hinted at better conditions. He signed to her to go into the shadow, and she vanished into it as though the night had received her again. He turned to the dog. It was at once clear to him that he could not shelter both, for people would hear the dog whining as they passed the doors, and would come out to see.

"Go thy way," he said, and it grieved him much to say it; "go thy way, thou art not the most helpless here!"

The dog saw that its shy hopes were at an end, and slunk away with the same gentle whining.

Goubin turned to the other.

"Follow me, mademoiselle, very quietly!" And

the night gave her back again, and she followed him like a shadow.

He bade her wait at the door, while he slipped downstairs again in order to fetch his lighted candle, as he always did, from a couple of working-people who lived on the ground floor. He heard the dog still; it was howling now with all the abandoned despair that may lie in the sound, and at a distance others answered it between the shots. Goubin shuddered, with a feeling that all this fright and terror touched him now quite otherwise than before, but yet without collecting his thoughts to a realization of what he had done.

"An awful night, citizen," said the artisan's wife, as she snuffed the wick. "Fair enough, though, for those who are no longer concerned in the business. Now at last we can begin to feel our lives safe and have only to bar our doors, citizen."

"Only that, citizen." And he took his candlestick and went, still unable to think.

He carefully unlocked the door and admitted his guest. She instinctively turned away from the light, so that he could not see her face, and did the same when she had passed the threshold. He set the light on the table and paced to and fro in the little room in an attempt to bring his mind to view his situation.

It was very serious, for this was no less than treason that he had committed, and he was risking

his own life by acting as he had done. Life in itself did not count for so much. He had accustomed himself to think of it as fuel which one is prepared to cast upon the fire should occasion demand. That was its proper end, and that was what the great men had done of whom he had read and in whose presence he lived. But to fling it away as a worthless thing out into darkness and shame, with no momentary gleam of splendor lighting it, to sacrifice it for a despised cause which he himself hated, —that he could not so easily bring himself to do. What was she, that dark shadow over there, who had suddenly brought a menace into his existence? One of the thousand furies of the Vendeans, who in wild recklessness had accompanied them and fired their cruelty, one who under other circumstances would have seen his life stamped out with as much indifference as if he had been a creeping thing trampled beneath the horses' hoofs!

He felt her look fastened upon him, doubtless as helplessly and beseechingly as it must have been just now, when the darkness hid it as was only right. A look of a hunted rat, of a wounded animal at bay, a look in which there was mingled all the helplessness, the fear, and the distress that placed human beings among the lowest of the low. His own eyes shone with resentment as he raised them to her.

Mon Dieu! How young she was, and what strange eyes she had!

All that he had expected was contained in them, but so infinitely different, and blended with so infinitely much besides.

Helplessness? Yes, certainly, or else they would have lied, and that they could not do.—Distress there was, but such as would never let a sound pass the lips, and was felt not only for herself but for all who were fallen and broken.—Fear, too, but not exactly for death, and enveloped in modesty, pride, and a thousand delicate and sensitive things. All at once he understood what this girl must be feeling, alone here at night-time, and dependent on a stranger's pleasure. That gave him immediately a strange joy and sense of power, a sudden glimpse of the possibilities that these poor walls might contain, but close upon that shame and pity, and fear of what his eyes might have betrayed.

"Mademoiselle," he said, in a voice which he wished to make respectful but which amid all these conflicting feelings became only constrained, "you have fled?"

She seemed to take it as a taunt. Her eyes flashed with indignation, and the lids sank over them to hide the tear-drops. But she looked up again at once, too proud to hide anything, too proud to make a secret of that which was obvious.

"Like all the others," she answered curtly. And

then at once, to empty the cup of humiliation without more ado and reach the bottom of sincerity: "When I lay there under the gate, I could have begged for my life."

She meant also, and Goubin understood it: "But now I beg no more." But what he especially noticed was the ring of her voice. It was strangely childish, notwithstanding its depth. It gave an impression of never having been able to say anything but the truth, as if it would have become cracked and changed otherwise, like a bell which has been flung from its high position and can never get back its tone.

The face entirely answered the voice, as very seldom happens. The large eyes perhaps did not see so much or very rapidly, but they looked always straight in front; they shone still brighter as if against a background of dark seriousness held in reserve. The rather high forehead was smooth and finely arched, as befits calm thought and dreamless sleep. The mouth, too childlike to be firm, bore a melancholy that disguised itself in a light girlish sullenness, displayed to discourage unwelcome admiration. Her mouth was the only thing that prompted the reflection that her life might have been like the lives of others.

All this was now pale and wearied, the high bonnet crushed, the dress spotted and heavy with wet. As she stood there she seemed to be a por-

trait in which time had worn away all the unessentials, but had lacked the heart to touch the beauty of the features otherwise than with a slightly softening breath.

Goubin's voice showed all the respect he desired it should contain.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I asked but to confirm my supposition. I am almost a stranger here, and I know not where to take you into safety, if any safe place is to be found. You see here all that I can offer you, and you must share it with me. Were I to go out, suspicions would be aroused, you understand; everything must take its usual course. The bed is yours; I myself will sleep here in my chair."

She rapidly followed his words and saw at once that they could not be gainsaid. She nodded her consent without a sound, but in the look that met his all her thoughts lay childishly revealed. There was gratitude, which knew not how far it ought to go, or whether it was friend or foe that met it; there was shy apology for the sacrifices she was claiming; there was questioning disquiet: "Who are you, of what nature is your soul, do you speak the same language as I?" And finally there was grief and weariness, and longing for the solitude of the dark.

Goubin replied at once to her mute questions.

"I am not of your party, mademoiselle; I have

hated your cause." This made no difference to her look, which remained no less questioning. An even prouder calm came into her eyes as they left him and traveled round the room.

"I am quite poor, mademoiselle,"—until now, when he saw her there, he had never thought how mean his circumstances were, and he blushed for them—"quite poor, and I have not much to offer you. You must be hungry. I have only milk and bread."

She made a gesture of refusal and went and sat down on the bed. By this she seemed to wish to show him that as his hospitality was, so she took it, simply, without its being bound to continue, with no claim upon his pity, but with the gratefulness and confidence that was proper between equals. She looked very tired where she sat.

The bed was poor and hard, with a patched quilt, the brick floor very cold, bare, and dirty, the walls spotted with damp. The tall, narrow linen-chest showed by the looseness of its drawers how empty most of them were. The writing-table halted and froze upon thin legs. Goubin looked around him with a curious interest, and he thought: I have been quite happy here. Now I may lose it any time.—And he longed for his book and his solitude. In the angle of the wall against the sloping roof he saw his shadow, sloping too, cut off just at the neck. He had never noticed it before,

and he stared in wonder at it. That, maybe, he thought, is just what awaits us both.

"Mademoiselle," he said calmly, "I will put out the light now. I hope that you will rest well, for you have need of it." And he blew out the candle.

"Good night, monsieur!" Her voice sounded doubly childish in the darkness, and rang for a long time in his ears. He wrapped his cloak about him and stretched himself in his easy-chair. It was impossible for him to collect his thoughts.

He heard her damp clothing rustle as she took it off, and he was glad at her confidence. He heard her fall on her knees and pray to gods that were not his. How strange it was! Yesterday they knew nothing of each other, and their thoughts, had they met under the stars, would have passed by like silent birds without suspecting it, each following its own track. Now the darkness held them in the same embrace, perhaps to meet the same fate, and yet they were no less strangers than before. He heard her lie down in the bed, and guessed at her shiver of cold and insecurity as she did so, then heard her gently turn, and with quiet breaths dissolve in sleep.

He himself could find no rest; he seemed to be lying and listening to fate, and he longed once more for his poor, vanished, untroubled world and strove in vain to bring it into accord with this strange and wonderful experience.

For a long time the dog was heard outside. At last its howling ended in a cry and a hubbub of voices, and was still.

He dozed off to sleep in the cold, and all things were lost to him.

III

He woke several times, listened in astonishment to her breathing, and fell asleep again. When it was almost light, he rose and silently made ready to leave.

She was sleeping quietly, looking very tired still, gray and pale amid the grayness and the paleness, softly folded up in slumber like a frozen and withered flower-bud. Now that he could not see her eyes she seemed more of a stranger than ever—what had she to do with his life? Like a hunted exhausted bird, straying in through an open window, she had come there and he had sheltered her. Could she not be let out again? Had he not merely to open the window and let chance rule, as in a thousand other cases? For him she meant danger—unsought, irrational—she meant death itself. And death, not as the delivering genius of the stories, the death which he knew and revered, but as the crowning absurdity, with shame and dishonor to follow. Was it for this that he had shaped his life, not without a struggle, to the purest of purposes, for this that he had kept his robe proud and unspotted and his will firm? It was not

from the danger that he shrank, but from the treachery against all that unborn part of him that longed to come to life and act. Should he himself be the traitor, he his own Judas, hanging himself with the wages of his treachery?

But he was very much afraid of waking her from the sleep she so much needed.

He carefully set out on the table what he had of food and drink, and wrote on a scrap of paper beside it: "Keep perfectly quiet till I come home!"

And with a continued irresolution that distressed him he stole out very softly, trembling at the noise of the key in the lock.

Down in the street he saw the dog again. It had been given a great wound, probably by some impatient patriot who was indignant at its howling, and all the more so since he knew to whom it had belonged. It lay now in a pool of blood, pressed against a wall, looking at every one who passed by. Quite still it lay, in that silence of dumb animals before death which is at once so humble and so dignified. The brown eyes, which had been so dark and had seen and understood so little, hardly more than an uncertain feeling for this, an uncertain terror of that, were now wonderfully clear and animated. They contained neither fear nor hope, but only begged, in their submissive complaint: O shadow, gliding before my eyes more clearly than I have ever seen you glide before,

help me out of the world of shadows, where I no more belong; help me from my torments, you who surely can do so!

Goubin went up to it, and as the animal's head sank confidingly into his hand, he put a pistol to its temple and freed it from its pain. He repented bitterly that he had deceived its confidence the night before, and shuddered at its last convulsion; but regrets and shuddering and all his conflicting thoughts of an hour ago were dissolved in a calm and deep compassion for all that was, all the unquietness that feared to rest.

With his customary sure and rapid steps, as of a man who lets the future be the future and holds himself erect upon the firm ground of the present, he proceeded to his work and attended to it as usual, with even shorter dreams than ordinary.

When he got home, the stranger was sitting motionless in his chair, and she met the candlelight with eyes that only slowly freed themselves from the darkness into which they had been staring.

"Were you afraid at my steps, mademoiselle? You could not know that it was I," he added, at her silent question.

She shook her head.

"I know nothing of you, either," she answered. "You are bound by nothing."

He did not trouble to reply to her insinuation: he was content at her tone. So there was to be no

question of thanks, which would have made him blush, and no embarrassing weakness. He had saved her, as he was bound to do; she had accepted, as she again was bound to do; and whether they succeeded or failed, the matter was now finished with. She had her world and he his; there was a wall between them, and so he would have it be.

"No one has disturbed you, mademoiselle?"

"No one. I have sat here. The day grew to twilight and the twilight to darkness, and I have hardly thought of anything. There is nothing to think of more.—Or is there?" Her eyes flashed, rising suddenly like a winged creature shaking the darkness from it. "Is there? You will tell me, sir? Our cause, my cause?"

"It must have been ended yesterday. Only the death-struggle left." It almost grieved him to say so.

Her face grew calm again.

"As I said, nothing to think of. The death-struggle is a matter of nerves and blood, nothing more. But the world is very empty without thought, and one shivers in it." And she gently shook herself and began to pace the room.

He had brought back food for them both and he laid it on the table. He invited her to eat and she helped herself very sparingly. Goubin, too, ate little; it seemed to him only like some curious game to be sitting there.

Suddenly she glanced at him and blushed, like one who has forgotten his duty.

"You ought, perhaps, to know, sir, who I am and what is my history. Since you may perhaps come to die for me, I mean, unless you think better of it. One should always know what one dies for."

The childlike quality of her voice was stranger than ever as she said these words. "Die" and "dies" sounded as if a spring had suddenly kept back its bubbling murmur, and the silence of the grotto behind had advanced darkly and deeply over it. There was also a mocking irony in these last words, which, perhaps, said more than they intended.

"Only the name, mademoiselle!" The rest was easy to guess. The childhood in an old castle, with the tree-tops of the park forming thick, peaceful clouds to the eye, with the sun's good-night in the west, shining calmly upon the calm, proud souls of equals. Mass in the private chapel, with the jubilation of bells above the altar when the miracle was accomplished and God Himself stepped down, reverenced and adored, and yet in some way come upon appeal, like everything else in an exalted and well tended existence. The world below and outside unknown and not regarded. Then unrest over the whole, its murmurs increasing as strange years passed by, a menace like the cry of circling hawks in autumn, incomprehensible messages by post, the rattle of the weather-cocks during the delibera-

tions of sleepless nights, long doubt and sudden resolution. Then the war, the crusade against that which would defy both Providence and Nature's laws, the men all in the saddle, the women waiting, exalted and intoxicated by the moaning of the wind in the silence and the first reports of victory. Impossible to remain there in the stillness! Away to where the horns echoed and the hunt was being decided! Out to help, if not with the hands, at least with the fiery and inflaming desire of the soul! And the mothers' blessings and the priests' consecrated banners, and the joy of riding and adventure, and then disaster and defeat.

A world of circumscribed and violent thoughts which had no place in the present, a world of spectres, as though the family portraits in the galleries, with no other substance than the pride supporting their pose, had stepped down from their frames and gone out to throttle in a nightmare the souls that aspired to life.

He would hear nothing of this in the tones of that fresh voice. "The name only, mademoiselle."

"As you will." She seemed to understand his reluctance. "Charlotte de . . . ."

"That will suffice, Mademoiselle Charlotte. My name is Jean Timoléon Goubin. And since we have nothing to talk about, and it is still so early, perhaps you, like me, would wish to read? I have a few books there."

"Thank you, Monsieur Jean, not now; it would be but words for me. For reading, too, one must have firm ground under the foot. Mine has given way. No, it is not sad at all," she added, seeing his look, "one can float about so freely. One feels oneself already a part of the wind and the darkness."

She looked so, as she sat, with her dark eyes dilated and the energy of her slender figure contained within itself. Now and then she would blink to drive away a memory that was about to become too clear, an anxious thought for some one dear to her, and the reflection of the light in her eyes fell like dying sparks. A part of the wind and the darkness? A part, rather, of that unknown force which lifts the souls of men to enthusiasm and desire for the great, and of itself can fill them with the sheer joy of living—in this case lost and doubting, having cast away the worthless toys it played with.

Goubin often looked at her over his book, she seemed no longer a stranger at all, although he had not wished to know anything of her; she was as a memory of the best moments of his lonely dreams. She suggested to him also migrating birds borne along amid darkness and storm, or song that waited silent in the whirlwind and the roar. Would it sink and thus be choked, or would it one day rise into the solitudes of air and light? That was all

one to him. In uncertainty, as now, he would choose to have it; he was content to feel his fate knit with hers, whether once only or for ever.

His book sank down, and she noticed it.

"Yes, you are right," she said, rising. "It is better to rest. Sleep is good, and it were wisest perhaps to grow accustomed to it."

Goubin put out the light and took possession of his chair. He found it still harder to sleep than on the previous night. He was cold, his thoughts flew hither and thither and had to be checked; his sleep, when it came, was short and disturbed by dreams. The stranger fell on her knees as before, and prayed to her gods for the lost cause which she would no longer recognize even to herself, lay for a time silent and motionless in the darkness, and then slept very tranquilly, breathing lightly. Probably she had her mouth a little open, Goubin thought, and he imagined how child-like it would be with that melancholy and disconcerting look gone from it.

IV

So passed a week or more, and Goubin began to grow accustomed to his new life, strange though it was.

He did his work as usual and had his usual one meal out, so as not to arouse suspicions by any change in his hours and habits; he walked with his confident and measured steps and held himself

erect and unapproachable. But he had more and more a feeling that he was walking in his sleep on dangerous paths, where an unexpected cry would be enough to make him start and lose his footing and fall to destruction. He felt his nature divided in two, like a celestial body, which shows only one of its halves to the eyes of men; the other, turned towards the stars and the secrets of space, did not know itself but lay beyond reach of words and language or of the sun and the vicissitudes of life, lay shining with a strange light towards death and that which lies behind. There the stranger had her place, she who existed but for him.

He had never been in love and did not love now either, if by that be meant longing and unrest. His blood took its usual flow to and from the heart, and his look was calm and clear as ever.

In the world of his imagination women had had little place. Hardly detached from the wrapping of words as he read, they had flitted past in stiff white robes in the shape of Portia, Cato's daughter, or the mother of the Gracchae—calm beings whose whole soul was yielded in a proud reply, and who immolated themselves in the second rank, behind the main action. Or else they had been insignificant creatures who were only there to make the web of fate more many-colored and mysterious, the embodiment of apostasy from thought, of weakness and foolishness, shadows merely,

which, though he could never understand why, had had power to lead men's looks astray. In life about him they had hardly occupied him at all. Half in shyness and disdain, and half in pity, he had looked upon them as creatures that strangely disturbed an existence which lay otherwise so even for the path of duty.

So it was very little the thought that she was a woman which made the stranger play her part in his life; her very helplessness was a protection there. But the danger to which she gave shape revealed darker depths on that account. That which was alien in her became still more unknown and enticing to the thought; she became twice as strange, cast into his world as a constant surprise.

In the mornings he avoided looking at her, but he knew that she was only feigning sleep, and all the day he found himself longing for her look. When he came home in the evenings his hand trembled on the lock, and he had to hear her child-like voice before he could regain his calm. She had washed and repaired her dress, her face was fresh and rested, and he saw that she grew prettier every day. He himself was worn out with cold and lack of sleep, and ascribed to this, in great measure, his curious condition of mind; he even began to fear sickness, should it have to continue longer.

In the evenings by candlelight he had begun to

read aloud, so as to keep his thoughts on his book and soar once again into the expanse that had given him peace before, that he might meet her there, calm where all was calm and great, and not disquieting and mysterious as elsewhere. He chose his beloved Plutarch, and she listened gladly and eagerly; it delighted her to hear more of these great ones of the past, whose very names had in former days filled her with wonder and rung in her ears, she knew not why, like the sound of bells in the wind. She had often asked her teachers about them—mild abbés with eyes that had grown used to gliding rapidly and respectfully past superiority in every form—and they had answered her with a bow in their tone, no less for her than for the faded memories of school-days and the altered order of things: "Miltiades, mademoiselle,"—or "Dion, mademoiselle, a man who died long ago, distinguished for heathen virtues, but who does not immediately concern us, mademoiselle." And by that she had understood that even if they might have had more to say, it would hardly have been worth her while to listen.

And now it was opened to her, this world, close enough to give an impression of new and amazing life—yet far enough to admit of a general view and the introduction into the story of that note which charms the fancy: "Once upon a time." She

was entirely held by it, and all her thoughts, like the floating homeless creatures they were, went out to meet it in its arrested dying beauty, like dark birds which take flight so close upon the setting sun that they may be thought to follow it. Her figure was mere expectant energy, as before, but her look now reflected a calmness as of wide, resting clouds.

But Goubin did not read well. Like most of those who sternly treat their own words like careless servants, he never grew closely acquainted with the words of others. There passed, too, into his voice something of the restraint and self-discipline that stamped his life; the writing never became anything but black on white. He heard it himself, and stammered with impatience when he saw that she too felt it.

"You must be tired, Monsieur Jean, let me read to you." And she took the book and read, and now for him also all became new, this that he still recognized so well that each episode followed the other with the sureness of remembrance. Where he sat and gazed at her, the light flowed out before his eyes in a golden mist supporting her and behind her the pictures of his fancy, all things together, near and far, like the events of the day when one is tired and thinks one has been through them before in some dream or previous existence, and wonders what they mean, and yet already

knows it in that inmost shrine to which no words can reach.

The silver echoes of her childlike voice increased and swelled; her soul, made for action, as the storm for flight, swept into the silent world of shadows, gave them blood to drink, made them quiver anew with the desires of life, and carried their words back, imparting to them the passion and proud calm that had been theirs at the beginning, when they had trembled like arrows burying themselves in the target.

Now and again they would break off their reading and listen to some unfamiliar sound. The danger was near them all the time, and they felt its suppressed breathing at their ears. Some one need only come outside the door and distinguish a strange voice for suspicions to be aroused. Soon afterwards the metal fittings of fire-arms would rattle against the bricks, gruff voices would cry: "In the name of the law," and the door would fly open and reveal death standing darkly on the threshold. They were not afraid of it; they almost longed for it, and the present with all that it contained became the dearer for this uncertainty. Without pausing to be reassured, they would turn once more to their stories and continue reading, and the light that flickered as it bent inwards in the draught was the only thing that showed uneasiness within this poor and narrow room.

But no one came, and they continued evening after evening. They preferred to linger over the latest periods, when the sun of happiness had almost withdrawn from Hellas and its caresses were all the dearer, as the evening light is wont to be, between long shadows in air that has grown chilly—over Philopœmen, Agis, or Cleomenes. It was thus, upon the verge of ruin, that they loved their heroes best, and thus, they felt, their longing for a past and vanished world came nearest to fulfilment.

When Philopœmen, leading his band of youths with purple robes under their mantles, entered the theatre just as the singer was singing: "For Greece I bind upon my brows the wreath of liberty"—and the air trembled with applause, with sobs, and jubilation, and the rows of seats fluttered white, as though a flock of birds were taking wing, right up to where the deep blue heaven began above the topmost row—then their own breasts swelled in unison with all these long since broken hearts, in the same illusion and the same sad certainty that all was but illusion.

When Agis passed through the land with his young and silent troop of warriors, their hair flowing far down over their shoulders, their hands closed tight about their weapons, their eyes bright with the joy of sacrifice, their lips shut firmly over their smile,—the whole as still as a vision of spec-

tres, as dignified as rows of figures on an urn with the ashes of dead men, which History musingly turns round and round before our lowered gaze—then they sat motionless in a grief which in its exaltation came near to being a kind of joy.

And in the last flaming vision of Cleomenes' wild march of destruction through the tyrant's court, of his dead body nailed upon the cross in a lion-skin with the sunken head still smiling and inspiring fear by its defiance, they saw victory in defeat, thought withdrawn from the changes and caprice of time and raised in triumph over its fight with matter, and they envied him his end.

There they sat in the shabby room, shivering a little with cold, strangely isolated with the danger about them, and each of them dreaming in silence, she of her lost cause, which had been trampled in the dust and seemed so poor and humble now, and yet was warmed by the heart's hot flame, he of his ideal, which hesitatingly drew in its steps, fearing to soil its robes in the world of the present. This unknown girl was now better known to him than any other thing. She entered into almost all his dreams, the only reality in all the changing world. She was Honor, waiting in uneasy rest, deep-eyed and clear-eyed, gazing before her, forgetful of herself. And the light burned down in its socket, panting as if the flame wished to take flight out into the darkness towards the unknown, where all

sounds were checked and fell, where all things waited like her—and silently they had to light a fresh candle and pursue their thoughts.

One night, when his head was dizzy with fatigue and he could no longer grasp the words otherwise than as curious echoes, he brought out the request he had been keeping back.

"Mademoiselle Charlotte, I am afraid this can go on no longer. I have not been able to sleep on account of the cold. If I fall ill, there will be no possibility of keeping our secret. Will you give me a place in the bed beside you?"

She turned her direct gaze upon him and thought rapidly over his words. "Certainly," said she; "why did you not tell me before? It grieves me to think you have been cold."

Her confidence came as easily as a child's handshake after its first shyness. It gladdened Goubin's heart, and, though he had not expected it, her consent now seemed to him so natural and obvious that he blushed at his former hesitation. When the light was out and he lay by her side, he fell asleep very soon with a delicious sense of fatigue and peace, such as he could not remember having felt since childhood, when the days were longer and the nights deeper and softer than ever they had been since.

But towards morning he dreamed.

All was discovered, the door into the porch

stood open, and the darkness nodded threateningly behind the grim faces of the other inmates of the house, who had dropped their ordinary looks with their everyday clothes and business, and now stared coldly and severely from between the bayonets. They were taken before the tribunal. Their case was soon decided, almost without words, only with looks filled with strange memories, fusing together persons and times that were long distant, confounding trifles and important things, staring at him and all that his life had contained in a deep and stony surprise that it should finish so. But he was not surprised; he felt clearer and lighter than ever before. He looked at his companion and found in her the same calm, and behind her head the expanses of the legends and the splendor from their common enthusiasm. This is Honor, he thought; out of the darkness she came to me, silently, with a finger on her lips, and without a word she points out to me the way. Why should voices rise about her and the sun of day shine on her? Is she not what she is without these? A proud silence is her nature; to follow unseen her earliest summons, that is happiness, that is all.

Bound on a cart, they were taken with the swiftness of dreams to Nantes, where the end was to be, down along the Loire. It was night all the time, and the waters of the river with their gray

gleam gave the only light there was. Groves and villages lay blacker than all else upon the black fields. Darkly against the darkness, a world of up-piled, shadowy clouds was outlined against the sky.

They stood before the death-tribunal and citizen Carrier, of whom report said so much. He was not terrifying at all; like a shadow, grotesquely lengthened and quivering in the trembling of the light that cast it, he stood there and dared not meet their gaze. He was the intoxication of destruction, he was the absurd terror of death, and he vanished to nothing before a proud glance, after having pointed towards the river. Still gray and dully shining, it was turning in slow eddies as it met the tidal water from the sea, and a thousand strange and pallid figures, upright and stiff, were rocking in its surges.

Now Goubin understood what it meant. It was there they were to be taken. Into those cold depths, whose dull gleam was that of Hades and the Styx, they were to be flung, and they would choke and sink and rise and be gently drawn towards the infinitude of ocean and as gently sucked back again, following the pulse of the tide under the mysterious forces of the moon and space. His only fear was that they would not both suffer together, that they would be parted. But already they stood on the deck of the barge, which was slippery with

tears and spray, stood there close together, with firm footing—nothing to grieve for longer, therefore, the wind fresh on their foreheads, salt foam upon their lips, and peace within their breasts.

Some one was occupied with their hands; something cut sharply into the skin—what was it? Ah, they were binding them together, and together they would sink. Like two flames melting into each other, two bubbles which, breaking, are enlarged to one, their souls would be crushed by destruction and from beneath the pressure would rise towards unknown spaces. As love folds two beings together, first in the look and desire, then in kisses and flame, and a new life is born from their meeting, mysterious, unexplainable, theirs and no longer theirs alone but also something new, so now death would drink both their lives in the same breath, and whatever came of it, annihilation or new birth, they would assuredly be one. What did it matter, then, which it was—their looks met in the same thought —what did it matter? Nothing, nothing at all; their eyes blazed to their inmost depths of certainty and joy, they were bound together like twin stars to shine upon each other through the ages. She and Honor, whose accents had been heard in his best moments, she and the Unknown, with all the secrets of a woman's fate! Joy seized upon him so powerfully that the dream broke, as it does

with every violent feeling; its gray world dissolved like mist before the sun, and he opened his eyes.

The daylight shone half in; beside him lay the stranger sleeping with that look of infancy which slumber always gives, sleeping with the peril outside, perhaps in the same dream as his, perhaps as far remote from it as heart can be from heart. His joy was gone, he felt only a quiet satisfaction in the protection he had given her, and he gently stole from the bed.

V

So several more days and nights passed by. As before, they spoke little to each other, they met in thought over the book or else in dreams, and that was sufficient for them. It seemed to Goubin as if words and talk were out of place between them, as though his very feeling for her presupposed a proud silence for its existence, and would have become forced and ugly if it had been mentioned. It hardly existed to the outward view and to the day, but in the depths it lingered mute, though concentrated and enclosed within itself; only in the heightened world of dreams did it gravely move among the shadows. Their position, too, was such that every approach to an ordinary tone was at once checked of itself, all light-heartedness became not only thoughtless cruelty but a danger.

He was very happy as things were, perhaps

just because they could hardly remain so longer—their freedom from discovery became a greater marvel every day. As often as he could he tried to learn something of the possibilities for her flight from the town. Through his position he at last found a way: suspicions had been reported against a family which was assumed to be in connection with the rebels, and an arrest was intended. Goubin at once made his plans; he resolved to let his protégée warn them and join herself to them in flight. It was treason twice over, but he was himself surprised to find that the matter seemed to him entirely obvious and simple.

In the evening he disclosed his plan to her.

"Mademoiselle Charlotte, you may now be free. You may now go back to those from whom you came." And he informed her in brief words what she had to do.

She received the news as calmly as all else, with only a suppressed shiver before the change awaiting her, such as a bird might know if, having lost its power of flight for a time, it had regained it and turned dizzy before the adventure. There was not a trace of gladness in her looks.

"I had not thought it," she said; "I thought all was finished. But if it be that life is offered me—and why should it not be so?—there is but one answer to give. And you, Monsieur Jean, whom I have already had to thank for every day, when

each hour has made its importance felt as perhaps the last in life, to you I am now indebted for an unknown portion of the future, whether long or short I know not, nor yet how great its value."

And after that they had not many words to say to one another.

They sat and waited for the night. The book was left lying, for neither had peace of mind to read. They only looked at each other now and again; when their gaze met, they smiled slightly, as was never their wont before, and with a forced air of encouragement. She sat and looked about her in the narrow room with an interest that was new to her. It seemed that already for her it was beginning to belong to the world of memory, where all is precious more or less, and nothing is unlovely in its wondrous peace. But it was very cold and bare, very small, and Goubin, as he stared and slightly shivered, with a numbness in his brain as when one is aroused from sleep and not yet fully awake, wondered how it would look afterwards, when all was as before and yet so different now that this had happened. The light burned audibly in the stillness, and their thoughts echoed audibly. The air seemed changed, as though the wall of danger which had hitherto encircled them was now removed: they felt a curious emptiness.

When the hour had come, they rose up to go. Their eyes met, as they used to meet in their

dreams, and the depths shone out grave and clear. And with a feeling of mysterious bonds, of invisible fetters as from star to star, they turned from the room which alone was to know that their lives had met, and passed out into the darkness.

Goubin went with her to her destination, saw her vanish like a shadow, and retraced his steps.

VI

Some years afterwards, when the land was beginning to grow quiet again, he received a letter secretly. He knew at once from whom it came, and in the somewhat stiff and nervous hand he thought he could discern her restrained movements of energy in reserve, the expression round the mouth with its melancholy sullenness, on the watch against approach or admiration, which must have accompanied the movements of the fingers as children's faces do when they write, and the look which deliberated whether every word was so true that it might have been uttered by that voice.

The letter ran thus:

TO MONSIEUR JEAN TIMOLÉON GOUBIN:

He who has received a benefit would gladly thank his benefactor with something more than words. He who has to thank another for his life possesses that life no longer. Like a Roman son, he holds it but as a loan which may be taken back where it was given.

My life is now yours, and perhaps also upon other grounds than this.

I was very happy with you. The air was light there, life seemed richer with her face ever half averted as in parting. That time has gone: life now looks full upon me. Will you accept it hand in hand with me?

I am free and almost alone now. I have wealth enough. I need hardly tell you that I have need of no one, and have little taste for anything that compassion may give.

CHARLOTTE DE COMBALET.

Goubin read it over several times and then paced up and down his room, more in reverie than in hesitation. He was very happy and lived over again in succession all that he could recapture of those wonderful days, as he had for long been doing with their separate fragments. He walked as though exalted by a calm, festive joy, and all that he looked upon in his poor surroundings took on the special meaning it had acquired when she was there, and met his consciousness with the fullness and significance which objects have in dreams. When the candle had burnt out, he lit a new one and sat down to write his answer without searching for words, merely listening to an inner voice and fixing it upon the paper:

MADEMOISELLE:

I was very happy when you were here. I still enjoy your presence, as when one listens to the echo of a song that is dead. One lives in it, one could wish it back, and yet those opening tones, could they once more resound in the ears, would disturb the finished harmony. It would not be the same, for the river of Time, like all other rivers, flows not back; it would be something new which would bear away the old into bluer distances. Life is but a kind of gradual death; whether it leads towards development or later to decline, each moment is buried in that which follows, nothing is stationary; even the mountain slowly melts before the rain.

Only when it is freed from the chain can memory stand shining and unchangeable. And it is so that I would have you.

You came from out the darkness, unexpected and unknown; you sat in my poor domain and listened quietly; your eyes had the constancy of the stars. You were honor and dreams for me, you are that still—can one ever reach them and call them one's own? To have merely caught sight of them is much, and is worth a high price: and have they stayed with one so long that one has stamped their features on the mind and now can always recognize them with no further chance of error, that is great happiness.

You have done so, you I shall always recognize. With danger in the air about you, shining against its dark background, you stand in my memory, beloved and revered. That space is you—without it all were weak and dulled and mean—that space is you forever.

JEAN TIMOLÉON GOUBIN.

DON JUAN'S RUBIES

[*DON JUANS RUBINER*]

FROM RESEBOKEN

1898

Don Juan's Rubies

I

DON JUAN DE MARAÑA Y TENORIO arrived one fine morning in the beginning of October at Baza, a medium sized town in the province of Granada. He had come through Cartagena from Naples, and was on the way to his native town—Sevilla, as all the world knows—in order to begin a new life there. This was not his intention on starting, but during the journey by sea, when the incommodiousness of the vessel had admitted of only the scantiest attention to his toilet, and the passage was uneven, Don Juan fell to thinking, which he had never done before, and to thinking gloomy thoughts, which he had had still less opportunity of doing. During a heavy storm in the night-time he seemed to see the tops of the waves becoming an awful shining fire of sulphur blue, and all these tongues stretching in a most unpleasant manner precisely at himself, as though to lick him up. There came into his mind all kinds of stories about Purgatory which priests and monks had told him when he was a child, and the truth of which he had never doubted, though his contempt for the said priests and monks had afterwards made him turn away from it with a grimace.

During his stay in Cartagena, where he had passed the time away with a love intrigue, this impression had been somewhat weakened, but now during this last ride in the fresh morning air it came again, stubborn and unwelcome, and was in some way connected with the even tramp-tramp of their ambling nags. It especially annoyed him constantly to hear his servant Graceo close behind him thinking that perhaps it would be just the same down there. Graceo followed the fashion of the time for lackeys in affecting a certain clown-like wit which brought him both more silver pieces and fewer cuffs than any other method of procedure, but which in the end became a little tiresome to his master. The bare thought of the stiffly sloping head and the forced smile under the turned-up mustaches amid all kinds of infernal torments was unpleasant—yet it was difficult enough to have patience with him.

During all this Don Juan was further reminded by the wind that whistled in his half-boots of his worst personal defect, his sturdy, well-filled calves, which for some years had been no longer fashionable: on the contrary they should be very thin now.

From what has been said it will easily be gathered that Don Juan was no longer in the gladness of his youth and the sunshine of his fortunes. He was, in fact, approaching the age when the possibilities for enjoying life are amassed by the

pleasure-seeker rather in an abstract form, such as power and gold, while the joys of the palate alone yield fully what they promise.

In Baza, when his meal was finished, he wandered about with his toothpick in his mouth and found all faces tedious, most of all that of Don Manuel de Ocañas, a gentleman whom he had known many years previously, when everything was brighter except Don Manuel himself. After having expressed in many well chosen words their mutual delight at meeting and their firm devotion until death to the brother and friend—really quite interchangeable terms—whom they saw before them, they went arm in arm to Don Manuel's house, where a large shield with Don Manuel's coat-of-arms was enthroned over the gate, while the lattice-work of the balcony at the side supported Don Manuel's drying linen. In a shaded room that took its light from the courtyard they continued to protest their undying affection and their vast delight, since they had nothing else to say to each other; but Don Juan could not help remarking that his host had something on his mind. At last, after a thousand excuses, the latter took a purse from his pocket, picked out three or four coins, which did not seem to be usable, fondled them with his fingers and his look, and was reluctantly preparing to consign them to a case. Don Juan's curiosity was aroused by the spark he had

suddenly seen flash in the otherwise unillumined eyes of his host, and he wished to know the reason.

"Señor Don Manuel, my deeply revered friend," said he, "it has not escaped me that the coins you have there are of quite unusual beauty, and you would render me a thousand-fold your debtor by permitting me to look at them more closely and supporting my ignorance by explaining to me their value."

Don Manuel leaped up eagerly and gave him the coins, though he need only have stretched out his hand and passed them.

"This, Señor Don Juan, is a Roman silver stater from Bilbilis, a now forgotten town in the neighborhood of Calatayud, the stamp is that of the emperor Tiberius, as you yourself can see. This is a Caligula from Osca, the present Huesca, and this an Emperor Augustus from Calagurris Julia Nassica, which, as you may easily hear, is the same as Calahorra."

Don Juan was amazed at all these unfamiliar names that flooded over him. "By San Gennaro—forgive me; I forget I am no longer in Naples—by all the saints, Don Manuel, you are a scholar then?"

Don Manuel raised his eyebrows and pushed the accusation from him with both hands. "Certainly not," he cried, "certainly not! But I am a collector, you observe, and therefore I have had

to learn many things if I would not be cheated. I have far better specimens than these, as you shall soon see." He drew out several small cases with smaller boxes inside them, which he began to take up. Don Juan sat there and stretched out his hand for the coins, looked at them and handed them back again. With the coin he was given every time one or more names, which it seemed to him that he had learnt as a boy and a youth, but had been wicked enough to forget. This made him feel humble and dejected, and even Don Manuel's proud and eager face gave him many thoughts which he did not at once succeed in arranging. To show that he was following, he seized a very badly clipped coin and held it up between his thumb and finger.

"This, Don Manuel," said he, "this coin with these curious marks, resembling keys and pincers, this is no doubt a Moorish *dirrhem?*"

But Don Manuel beat down his mistake from a distance.

"By no means," he cried. "It is, as I have told you, Señor Don Juan, an Arabian *felûs.*" And Don Juan felt himself still smaller and realized that he had been mistaken in more than one thing in his life—in Don Manuel himself, for instance, who now almost impressed him. And while his host, as he showed him one of the greatest treasures in his collection, a Gothic coin with King Achila's image, was elaborating a long argument

to the effect that had this species of coin not been found, we should be so unfortunate as not even to know that this king had reigned, Don Juan's impressions at last resolved themselves into clarity. He gravely regarded Achila's head, which looked as if it had been drawn by a child of three, and seeing a cross on the reverse of the coin, he kissed it reverently.

"Don Manuel here," thought he, "is a happy man: that must be as certain as that my legs are too stout"—and he drew them under his chair. "His eyes show clearly that at every step he finds a new goal for his efforts, just as Graceo's mule spies a fresh thistle after every bend in the road. Every one of these coins is a triumph: he has it laid up in a casket and can take it out and enjoy it. And there are some left to search for, probably a whole host, for who can tell how many kinds of coins there are? These bits of money have slipped away just like mine, some one has bought with them pleasure of some kind, which has vanished now, but Don Manuel has the coins. What have I collected and gained? It is I who resemble Graceo's mule, for thistles are all that I have had!"

This and much more Don Juan pondered for the first time, while his host talked happily about King Achila. But now Don Manuel with beaming face held up another coin, which he had kept till the last.

"This, Señor Don Juan," said he ceremoniously, "is a Phoenician coin from Gadir or Cadiz. I would not change it for any earthly profit. On the reverse it has a fish, a dolphin, on the obverse a head, which, as far as my knowledge goes is that of their goddess Astarte, the goddess of love."

As he stretched out his hand Don Juan thought:

"The goddess of love! Have there been people who have made a god out of anything so entirely and essentially dull?" And after looking at the round features of the head, which he found unutterably stupid, he handed the treasure back. "Señor Don Manuel, my honored friend," said he, "I must express to you my wonder, not only at your good fortune and joy, but also at the mellifluous wisdom by virtue of which you would deserve still greater happiness, if that were possible. This last coin alone would have compensated me in full measure for the years of my life, had I been wise enough to seek for it."

Don Manuel hid his smile of triumph beneath his mustache, and wishing to show politeness in return, he answered:

"Ah, Don Juan, you have not been idle! Even to us reports of your doings have penetrated. In that sphere you have driven me out of the field. Who could have guessed it when you came as a shy youth to Salamanca, and we taught you to

pluck at a guitar and sing a seguidilla or practised the latest Italian thrust with you?"

Don Juan could not remember that his host had had any knowledge to give away in these matters, but he did not even trouble to smile at his boast. He let his gloomy thoughts overflow, since they had once been brought into the channel.

"Ah, Don Manuel," he burst out, "you have not in your whole collection a coin so small that it would answer to all that. The girls of Flanders weep in the most disagreeable way when one leaves them, and spoil all the fine Flemish lace round one's neck, and Germans talk thickly in the most difficult of languages and expect one to swear eternal faithfulness to them in it; the ladies of Milan eat fried fish, of which one grows tired, the Bolognese die for you or else arrange a meeting near a couple of abominably sloping towers. Roman women have rough voices and hang you as full of amulets as a fish has scales, and Neapolitans think you have the evil eye as soon as you look obliquely at them. As for our own ladies—but excuse me, I do not know from which town your own señora comes, so let us take them in general—have you observed that they wish us to cease eating and so lose flesh for love? And then these phrases, eternally the same, so indescribably enervating! One must be everlastingly amazed at the sun—'Is it Aurora that meets me, since I see

that all the former objects of my admiration were but stars that are extinguished now? What splendor is this that so pitilessly blinds and scorches me?'—And so on! I assure you, Don Manuel, one grows tired of these innumerable sunrises, and, as you are aware, one catches cold most easily at that time of the day."

Don Manuel's tiny eyes gleamed and darted to and fro, like bleak at the water's edge, in the greed and curiosity aroused by all the experiences here hinted at. "Ah, my dear friend, it must be very interesting none the less," he sighed between lips that had become moist. But Don Juan did not trouble to parade a shred of his triumph before him; he did not even feel that he had known any triumphs now.

"When I look at your fine collection, Señor Don Manuel," he continued, "I think in bitter envy, I admit, of what I have brought together. Locks of hair, letters, amulets—in most cases I have forgotten where they belonged. I could never bring any system into them, and in many cases I have nothing left."

Ah, well, Don Manuel did not mean that any methodical and properly arranged collection could be made of them, but nevertheless he thought they must possess a certain charm.

Don Juan sat just as gloomily, with his legs under his chair, and thought aloud.

"When I was young," he murmured, "it was a little different. It seems to me that I felt many things then. I know not what it was, but, by all the fiends, it amused me! The very uncertainty of danger had something tempting in it, and there were—I seem clearly to remember that there were—charming women. But now, whether it be they that are more stupid or I that have grown wiser, you can form no conception how identical they are. Their passion, fall, and remorse proceed as regularly as a drill, every one of them knows her time in the most irritating fashion. It is like catching birds in one's boyhood, Don Manuel. The only difficulty was to take the first decoy-birds, to make the first capture, after that all was so easy that one soon tired of it.

"And the nuns," concluded Don Juan, with something like exasperation, "the nuns are the dullest of the lot. It is a little difficult to get over the wall, but afterwards—the fruit that is fastened to an espalier ripens soonest of all.

"As I told you, you are happy with your little caskets. I can wish nothing better than that you may find a King Achila the Second and ticket him as inalienable property in your family. As for me, I must go now, and shall shortly leave your town, but I would thank you for this instructive and unforgettable hour. If you ever see me again, Señor Don Manuel, it will be as another man."

And with a thousand assurances of his loyal devotion until death he parted from his friend, who in some amazement stared after him a while and with dully gleaming eyes mused upon his words, before he turned to rearrange his coins.

II

Don Juan passed out again into the unpleasantly dark entrance and shivered in the evening air, until Graceo, who had borne his cloak after him, came out from the servants' quarters and hung it over his shoulders. Graceo at once began to prattle after his familiar habit about the people of the house, but his master did not listen to him and intentionally slammed the gate to behind him so that it might crush him a little. Outside, night had fallen, and the full moon was peeping down upon Don Juan through the lattice of the balcony exactly under one of Don Manuel's extended shirts, as if it had jestingly wished to hide itself there. Don Juan looked up at the shining disk, which was mirrored in his slightly prominent brown eyes and grinned upon their vacancy, then he shivered once more, sighed, and went, without knowing why, merely by force of habit, to the corner of the garden wall. When he saw his shadow outlined blue and dismally there, he drew himself up to his accustomed elegance, so as not to seem ridiculous before it, and hummed a tune as he waited for his

valet to catch him up. The latter was limping from the blow he had received on his knee, and was therefore displaying to even less advantage than usual the over-modern drumsticks with which Nature had provided him.

"Graceo," said Don Juan in a friendly tone, in order to encourage him, "I think you said that Don Manuel has three daughters?"

"It is quite possible, Señor," answered the injured man; "three things are always certain, but I, and he himself, too, know of no more than one, as I lately had the honor of informing you, Señor."

"But I thought I heard three names."

"That is also possible, although I thought you did not hear me at all, Señor. At all events, I thought I hurt my knee in the gate, though I have forgotten it now, and I may at the same time have forgotten all that I knew before."

But Don Juan's sour looks showed him that he would do well to lay aside both his wit and his grudge for the moment, and he continued in a respectful tone: "It is only that Doña Marcela has two friends staying with her, Doña Angela and Doña Silvia, and all three are walking in the garden now and talking, as I may guess, about yourself, Señor, for a duenna came and questioned me while I was eating cheese and chestnuts with Lisardo, a very agreeable fellow. I could have eaten more chestnuts if she had not come."

"And are they fair, these ladies? You did not catch a glimpse of them?"

"To judge by the duenna they may be as lovely as possible, for she was uncommonly ugly. I only know that the chestnuts were good and the cheese as old as could be desired. But hush, master! There they go! I can hear the sand crunching."

It was really so, and Don Juan stole gently to the wall and listened. It would not have occurred to him just now that he would ever do such a thing again, but the moonlight and the wall were too much for him. And it was not to be expected that he should be entirely indifferent to the knowledge of what other people thought of him, now that he intended to begin a new life, and consequently felt his personality increasing in importance.

"Don Juan de Maraña," he heard an empty, drawling little girl's voice saying, "that is he of whom they all tell so many stories, though one can never hear them right."

"You seem to have good ears, Silvia," answered another complaining voice. "I can only hear about the saints, and King Rodrigo and the traitor Oppas, or the Cid, or the red king of the Moors and Don Pedro. But perhaps Don Juan is a saint, too; perhaps it is to him you go and pray when you look so cross?"

"You know as much about him as I do, Angela,

although you pretend not to," answered the first.

But Doña Marcela interrupted her quickly. "It is he," she said, "but he is old now. Porcia caught a glimpse of him and thought he did not look at all up-to-date. His valet was old, too, she said, and seemed harmless and absurd. There is not much to talk about any longer."

"Still, it would have been pleasant to see him, I think," sighed Angela. "It would be a distraction to see somebody. One gets so tired of always being alone."

There Silvia agreed with her. "It is insufferable," said she, "and since he is so old, they might easily have shown him to us. It would be amusing to make game of him a little."

"It would be pleasant to have a little practice in singing redondillas," added Marcela. "I found a whole pile last night by my window, about Love and Cupid's darts and jealousy, exactly as they should be, and I sang them out over the garden, but there was nobody to answer, and so I soon gave it up. A poor old man like that could at least stand outside and invent answering verses until a better came along, for I should like to learn the art properly."

"Why so, Marcela?"

"Ah, don't pretend, Angela! Love must be the most delicious thing of all. It lifts one up to the skies, they say; it makes one forget everything

except how one looks, and at the same time makes one far prettier. Then, when you have kept it up for a time, growing warmer and warmer as the nights get colder, he makes his offer, and you get the loveliest jewels and are no longer shut up."

"Don Juan is very rich and of good family."

"Did you think I meant him, you goose? Well, perhaps so, until a better and a younger comes along, for he is, as you say, rich."

"And it would be a good action to convert his soul to good."

Here they all grew serious. "Certainly," said they, "certainly!" And from their silence Don Juan thought he might conclude that they were praying for him, with the sand crunching under their little feet and their lips imperceptibly curling. Then some one called from the house above. "It is time for us to go home," said Silvia. "They have come for us." And when she had sighed and answered, their steps were heard dying away.

Don Juan remained staring at his shadow with as fierce a look as if he meant to run it through with his sword.

"Ha, ha," he muttered, "has it gone so far with me? It remains to be seen first whether I cannot teach these little pullets a lesson."

"Graceo," he said aloud, "go back at once and follow Doña Silvia and Doña Angela, and find out

where they live. I myself have a little business here, but I shall soon come home and I expect to find you there."

Graceo lingered and cast a trained eye about him. "But, master," said he, "alone here? The wall is high."

"See to your own affair, Graceo, and see to it well! Do you suppose that in the house of a Don Manuel all the gates are properly closed?" And whistling softly, with an indescribable bearing of boastful pride, elastic youth, and investigating caution, Don Juan went slowly along by the wall, while Graceo, still limping, went off on his errand.

Some little time afterwards the experienced gentleman stood under the window which he guessed to be Marcela's, in a magnolia bush which was now growing thin as the autumn advanced. He began to sing, softly and alluringly:

O Love, of tyrants most cruel,
What need of thy spear and dart?
One look—which who can avoid or flee—
Can pierce to the depths of the heart.

And when a moment afterwards a black silhouette appeared in the window against the pale lamplight, he said with flowing tongue:

"Is it Aurora that meets me, since I see how the stars are extinguished? Is it the sun, that

scorches and blinds me?"—and a whole string more of the same stuff.

Doña Marcela was less tardy in answering than he in finishing. She did so in a tone of witty mockery, such as alone was suitable for a self-respecting dame after such hyperbole. She meant to hint that she would never dream of believing it, but still less of doubting, since she replied to him at all: she let him understand that it was far to Rome, but that the way thereto should be made as pleasant and agreeable as possible.

"Is it the night that speaks to the sun?" she asked in return. "How dark must that night be, when my dark beauty seems to it a sun! But by the far advanced position of the world to-day the night should learn what little prospect he has of meeting the sun."—And so on in the same vein.

When they had continued thus for a time, the moment came for Don Juan to declare how he had been attracted to the town of Baza solely by reports of Marcela's beauty, which had been the polestar (or more properly the sun!) to guide him on his homeward way. In this town, which moreover drew its elixir of life solely and simply from the said beauty, his fate was now to be eternally decided, and here on his knees in the dust he prayed to be as kindly received as he had been cruelly wounded by a mere glimpse, a glimpse all too short, in the street.

As Don Juan was a little uncertain whether his adored was dark or possibly by a happy accident fair, and was therefore afraid of falling into error if he embarked upon a further description of her charms, he was anxious to put an end to the conversation for that night and come away—a task which he had no difficulty in accomplishing in a graceful manner. Moreover, he found it a trifle cold to stop long in the magnolia bush with its damp leaves. He departed, therefore, after having at different intervals sung two redondillas, more passionate in tone the farther off he stood; and when well outside the wall he hurried home to learn what Graceo had discovered and to lay his plans for the comprehensive undertaking into which his wounded vanity and his ennui and perhaps also the moonlight had led him.

Doña Marcela remained at the window, smiling and undecided, happy yet uneasy. She wondered if she had not heard false reports of Don Juan hitherto; she was pleased that he was rich and of noble birth, and felt it pleasant also to be involved in an intrigue. She hesitated over two things: whether she should take the duenna into her confidence, for the gaining of further advantages, and whether it would not be still more agreeable if she really fell in love, of course after having first seen Don Juan's face by daylight.

III

During the next few days Don Juan was busily occupied, now at one end of the town, now at the other; he came home late and slept little, but never failed to attend mass in one of the three churches, or missed his walk at sunset. He seemed much younger than before, was light and nimble in his walk, cheerful in his look, and had that calm symmetry of movement which a well-apportioned day can give. Graceo also had many things to do, but they only made him older; he grumbled at everything, at the street-paving and the art of writing. He swore at the notary, who sat in his corner and printed off letters for all who wanted them. "Writing, any lout can learn," he said. "He has only to put on an important air and mess his fingers. I could have done it, too, if I had been to school. But it needs genius to get the legs that God has given you to serve when you have to carry round the products of all this quill-driving, and to deliver them where there are dogs needs philosophy, too." But he received many reals from his master and spent them in drinking wine in the evenings with different people, to each of whom he gave a different explanation of his business in the town.

Don Juan himself, having met his friend Don Manuel two or three times, explained to him that he had decided to stay on until the great festival

should be celebrated. There was a relic to be installed with all the usual solemnities in the church of San Jago, a very precious relic, one of the fangs of the serpent that had tempted Eve from Paradise. All the more important families of the town were to be present at the ceremony, and Don Juan, as his honored friend could very well understand, would not for anything miss this edifying spectacle, which now in his altered state of mind had a heightened attraction for him.

Meanwhile Don Juan had new and splendid apparel made to be used on that occasion, and also bought a costly diamond clasp to wear in his hat, for which purpose he paid a visit to Israel Perez, the best goldsmith in the place.

Israel had not "limpieza," that is to say, pure Christian blood, but he himself was a Christian: it was to do him grave and perilous wrong to state anything else. Every Friday he ate fish so near the front of his shop that any one could see him, and any other day in the week he would buy, again so openly that all might see, a piece of pork, which he would bury in his back garden after nightfall. He was a shrewd fellow, with an excellent knowledge of precious stones.

When Don Juan had chosen his clasp, he asked to see some other jewels. "I want some more uncommon stones," said he, "some solitaires of one kind or another. They may cost what you will."

"Then my gracious benefactor has only to choose," answered Israel with a bow, and he retired for a moment to select the required article from his secret stores.

"See here, my protector," said he, as he returned holding a large and magnificent ruby like a burning coal between his crooked black fingers, "see here the wonder of Ceylon, the treasure of Taprobane, which the holy king Alexander captured from the Moors there. Its color is as the noble señor's own blood; see now, when I hold it in the half-light it is merry and nimble as fire, but it is shot with blue! This stone is altogether unique; there is not its like in all the world, and it has rested in its time upon the forehead of the goddess Venus."

"I am well content with it," replied Don Juan, "but it is tiresome that it should be unique, for I would have had others."

"Then my gracious benefactor has only to say the word, for I have two others, just the same," said Israel with some embarrassment.

"And each of them perhaps just as unique as this one?"

"Your highness deigns to jest with a poor man; it is very friendly of your grace. But I have no more than three, I swear; they have rested on the foreheads of three idols, Minos, Æacus, and Rhadamanthus."

"I thought you said something different about this one."

"That was but another name for the same Rhadamanthus, sir."

And to finish with these ambiguities, Israel Perez hastened to fetch the other stones also, and went on talking eagerly with wide gestures which made the red points between his fingers dart to and fro against his black coat like sparks upon burnt paper.

"Ah, sir! Ah, sir! These three stones, what can one not buy with them! Honor, sir—if there is so much honor left—here is enough for three hearts! Innocence, sir—if there are so many innocent—these stones can dazzle three pairs of eyes! Hold one of them up in the dark and it will shine of itself, and for these stones three blades, ready for anything, may be yours. Put them to holy uses, and the first will buy you free from Hell, the second from Purgatory, and the third from Paradise—oh, my accursed tongue! I mean that for the third you will be let to stay there!"

Don Juan sat revolving something in his mind, moving his fingers to and fro upon his knees and only half listening to the other's words. "And so it is your soul's welfare that you are prepared to sell, Israel?" said he. "Name your price, and if there are so many gold pieces in my purse, I will take the stones, for I think they will serve my purpose." And as they soon came to terms, he

took the jewels and ordered a different setting for each of them, to be ready one each day.

That evening Don Juan stood in the magnolia bush and sang, very softly, long and passionate redondillas, while Marcela, who had in a short time developed her natural talent, improvised whole poems in answer, which made her very proud and happy. When they had said well-nigh all that could be said of love, the sun, jealousy, and the half-life, or rather death, which they each suffered in the absence of the other, Don Juan made a lengthy declaration.

"The joy that fetters me here," said he, "is the deciding factor in my life. I have wandered before, I have many times gone astray, but now I stand before the pole-star of my love, the fixed, immovable northern star. I have guessed it all the time, and have kept my real love pure and untainted within my breast. See, here I have a jewel, this red stone burning in the darkness like a heart in flames. It is peerless and unique in all the world; it is fairer than any other ruby. This stone I have always borne about me; I have wished to bestow it only where my heart should find another worthy of itself and of this gift. Now I give it without reserve, now I beg that for a moment I may be allowed to lie at your feet and present it to you. With it I give you all." Much more he said, and among other things that immediately after the

great church festival, where he hoped to make the acquaintance of her family, he would openly appear as her suitor.

Doña Marcela was naturally very curious to see the stone and was also touched by his words. They were eloquent, they did her much honor and himself, too, for anything finer than a whole life's striving after perfection, with its issue in herself, she had difficulty in imagining. She had also found pleasure in Don Juan's exterior by daylight; she thought his eyes beautiful and expressive, his figure still young, and his dress rich. But she knew that it was a far more serious matter to let her admirer into her chamber than to bestow on him a look at the church gate or to sing redondillas over his head into the darkness; she felt herself seized by an agreeable trembling and a pleasant temptation towards the unknown. And so it was only with a half-refusal and with genuine regret that she answered:

"But, Don Juan, that cannot be, for no approach to my chamber is available. Next door to me sleeps Porcia; I hear her through the wall. She is incorruptible, she is honor itself, and if she is disturbed she is cross and will answer no to anything whatever, for she has respect for the proprieties and is especially out of humor when she wakes."

But Don Juan answered almost cheerfully:

"But there is no need to go that way. This little

ladder here is easy to haul up by a cord and easy to attach. Only find a cord, or let me throw one up to you!"

This about the rope ladder decided her. The temptation was too strong, for ladders she had always dreamt of, though never seen. A cord was easy to find, and it was as an enamored woman that she let it down through the window. For a moment, as she saw the whirling motion of the ball of twine, it came upon her how as a child she had been wont to play with kittens in that manner, and it was with a smile that she saw Don Juan eagerly fumbling for the ball. A moment afterwards she hauled up the ladder and fastened it with anxious care that it should hold.

That same evening Graceo sat with wild, red eyes in a wine-shop explaining to a chance acquaintance, an alguazil, how he was staying in the town with a view to obtaining employment in that gentleman's famous and respected corps, while his master, too, intended to settle here in order to become alguazil mayor, to which post he was expecting a nomination, thanks to high connections at court.

IV

For the great church festival the gentry of the town of Baza were assembled in a room that overlooked the market-place, in one of the most distinguished houses. From there they were to accom-

pany the procession, but the time before was to be employed in secular and merry thoughts, and all the more naturally as it was only upon such rare occasions that the unmarried maidens could show that they existed, otherwise than with a prayer-book in their hands and a duenna behind them. Every one was dressed as sumptuously as his means allowed, and they had therefore the greatest interest in eyeing one another.

Fairest among all the maidens were Doña Marcela, Doña Angela, and Doña Silvia, and to them all eyes were drawn. From their mulberry-colored velvet dresses, held out at right angles from the hips by their hoops, their graceful forms emerged like nosegays set in dark-glazed Moorish vases. Their heads and necks, whose warm golden hue was not yet overlaid by the shining paint of gold-leaf which in the most elegant circles was beginning to be the fashion, surprised and delighted by their freshness—they were really like flowers, like pale and lovely tulips. They had a certain resemblance to one another; one could not say what it was; not in their dresses alone, which several others had in the same durable and fashionable color, but also in their faces and expressions. A delighted glow of pride shone from them, and the eyes of all three ended their circle at the door every time they cast a triumphant glance around them. One could have said that like flowers they

were drawn towards the sun which gave them beauty. Around them young admirers pressed so closely that their swords, all at the same angle to their sides, formed a metal railing to fence the damsels round like images of saints, and they could not see each other for all the heads that hid the view. The older gentlemen congratulated their fathers on such miracles and phoenixes of beauty and virtue, but Don Manuel for his part was so much occupied by his latest find, the absolute pearl of his collection, a Greek coin from Sagunto, that he paid little heed to anything else.

But all at once there was a movement in the hall, which made the crowd about the three friends thinner and allowed them slowly to approach each other—as rapidly as a fitting demeanor and their stiff dresses would permit. It was the renowned stranger, Don Juan de Maraña y Tenorio, who had entered and with easy grace was greeting his acquaintances and through them making the acquaintance of the rest.

How handsome and imposing he looked none can imagine who had not the advantage of living in his day and meeting him in person. His somewhat scanty hair lay hidden under his cap, and the flashing diamond clasp diverted all attention to itself. His sloping forehead showed clear and even and almost venerable, especially since he bore his head so high. His prominent brown

eyes had no rivals but each other in brilliance and proud assurance, his lips wore a chaste and bewitching smile. He carried his hands and elbows like no one else, and the laces that adorned his neck and breast were more dazzlingly white and fine than any others there. The only thing that could be objected against him was that his legs, notwithstanding their dark and very tight silk stockings, were somewhat too substantial for a man of his pretensions and rank.

Radiant and triumphant, he slipped between the different groups, stopped with each a moment and turned to the next, his movements thus assuming the course of a heavenly body, which, rotating round its own glory, moves on among the lesser lights. The three young ladies observed him with still more pleasure than all the rest; they took short breaths which trembled with expectation. Then they turned to one another with a smile of triumph, and remembered that they had not met since that evening when they had talked all manner of foolishness about him in the garden.

What was it that caused their smiles to stiffen, and the natural easy pride before a well-loved friend and rival to become hard and cold? Over the ear of each, embedded in the dark hair, so that it only half shone out, was a large and splendid ruby—that was the first thing that met their gaze. They stood there mute, their thoughts crowding

upon them, and at that moment a foolish old pedant, Don Eugenio de Figueroa, came up, and noticing the three rubies, took from them an idea for a vapid, simultaneous compliment.

"Fair graces, what is this I see?" he called; "what means this mark of sisterhood? Is it a bee that has taken you for flowers and stung you—ah, happy bee!—or are they three coals from Vesta's holy altar? Do they signify that all tears and sighing will rebound from your stony hearts?"

Happily, if in this situation one may speak of happiness, Marcela's mother here drew her away to be presented to Don Juan, who, as he paid his glowing compliments, dexterously contrived to draw her a little apart, so that they might exchange a word or two.

"You have deceived me, Don Juan," said she, darkly. That was all she dared to say, though she would have liked to strike him to the ground to avenge her cruelly wounded vanity. And at his innocent look she hinted: "The ruby, the peerless jewel!"

"Ah!" Don Juan's look shone and caressed her. "I have not deceived you, as you think, Doña Marcela. I only wished to punish you a little for your contempt before you saw me, for those words you spoke in the garden. But love broke the point of my revenge. Your ruby, Marcela, hear me as I swear it, is genuine. The others are counterfeit."

And when he saw that the explanation changed the whole case for her, and even gave her jewel a heightened value, he left her with a smile and came at length to Doña Angela. Here, upon much the same demand, he repeated exactly the same words, and with the same effect.

A third time the same scene was repeated; and after that Don Juan stayed his hand, and did not trouble to secure many introductions. He saw the three friends happy once more, he felt a little weary; and the procession of the holy relic was on the point of being formed.

He himself took his place in it by the side of a very pious old lady, who was entirely satisfied with his devout mien, no less than with his handsome figure.

When the ceremony was ended he went straight to his lodging, and after some little trouble managed to get hold of Graceo, who, firm believer as he was, had signalized the importance of the day by going about when the procession was over and throwing stones at the windows of any of the townsfolk who had shown themselves lukewarm and suspect, including those of Israel Perez, though he had made every effort to be present at the festival.

"Graceo," said Don Juan, "you will pack our baggage to-night, and see that our horses are fed. Early to-morrow we leave Baza."

Graceo stared in amazement.

"Master," said he, "I thought you were bound here with three-fold bonds. After all the business I have had! It is hard not to be allowed to sit on a doorstep and rest!"

But Don Juan's serious look compelled him to silence and obedience, or to keep his grumbling low.

V

And so it was on a fine morning at the end of October that Don Juan de Maraña y Tenorio left Baza, the aforesaid medium sized town in the province of Granada. He was also still on the way to his native place, Sevilla, to begin a new life there. He listened to the tread of Graceo's mule behind him and thought, as the fresh morning air whistled in his half-boots, about Don Manuel's collection and his calm, happy look of conscious honesty, and about Doña Marcela, Doña Angela, and Doña Silvia, who even already tended to melt together before his eyes into a single figure with three rubies. "This is no longer to be endured," he muttered; "it is, as I have said, a barren field on which I have entered. If only one of them had doubted that last thing I told them! But they devoured it as eagerly as do carp a piece of bread one throws them, and dived down to the depths with it. If only one had doubted, I would have striven to win her, she would have been my King

Achila, and I should not have been happy, till she had become mine again."

He found the air gray and unpleasant, in spite of the fine weather; he lingered long to watch a blind beggar who, with a boy at his feet, was eating bread and onions and seemed to be much enjoying them.

"Graceo," he asked, "can you guess why that beggar is so happy?"

"It is no doubt his cursed habit, Señor," answered that hardened jester.

"By no means! It is because he cannot see how mouldy his bread is. The boy sees it, and chooses his bits, and will never be as fat as he. And he gets tears in his eyes from the onions!"

Throwing them a copper, he pursued his way, and between master and servant the following dialogue took place, though Don Juan did not turn round, nor did Graceo's mouth relax for one moment its jocular grimace.

"Does it not seem to you, Graceo," said Don Juan, "that the life we have lived during the—five years you have been with me has been very dull?"

"It may have been my fault that you should think so, Señor, for true it is that I have spent my pound in amusing you, and that in such a way that I have clipped it, as the money-changers do with gold coins, and shall soon have only the lead remaining."

"But you yourself, Graceo?"

"Ah, some men want one thing and some another. For my own part I regret only the shoes I have worn out and the gifts I have not received. 'It will be a swan, said the hen, when she laid her egg in the water,' so an uncle of mine used always to say to me when he heard folk complain that they had not become what they had expected. 'Tis true I thought that I with my appearance might do something better than merely carry messages for others. But I defy any one who cannot read addresses to deliver notes as well as I."

"Well, then, Graceo, you shall have something else to do. You shall be my steward, for I intend to settle down at home and begin an entirely new life. I expect also the same of you."

"No need to wait for that, Señor. I mean to begin a life that will make me by five inches a better man. Instead of stealing the honor of others, I shall hold to my master's property with all a faithful servant's zeal. But when you have any letters to send in the darkness, I beg that I may perform the service, so as not to reform too suddenly, and because another might confuse them."

To this Don Juan answered nothing, and they rode on in silence.

However, notwithstanding Graceo's doubts, Don Juan did become another man. The stories

that are still told of him bear witness to this fact, though with poetic exaggeration.

One of them states that he became a monk and a fanatic, a story which is inadequate on the face of it. For fanatics are not made of those who have given themselves away in beggar's doles. The fanatic is the gamester who has staked his whole life upon one board and lost, or the miser who would make his goods suffice also for another world.

This tradition must be interpreted to mean that as this gentleman advanced in years and came to think both on his sins and on the advantages of Paradise, he steered his course so that he ever kept an eye upon both quarters. Another legend, an obvious *legend,* says that he was carried away, while still in the full flow of his wickedness, by the Commander's statue, which he had bidden to supper. For any one skilled in the interpretation of myths this will clearly mean that respectability took him to its embrace and overwhelmed him with honors, when he deserved them, and that he saw commanders at his house to banquets.

This Don Juan's happy amendment was assisted beyond a doubt by the phase of his life, that October month, which he passed in the town of Baza, and of which the history is here for the first time recorded.

HIDDEN FIRES

[*DET STUMMA*]

FROM DE FYRA ELEMENTERNA

1906

Hidden Fires

I

THE village lay between hills, just where the mountain district in its last descents stepped down on to the wide, low coastland. The woods were taller and thicker than they are to-day, and covered every part where no water-course with its spring and autumn floods had kept away the trees, building walls of alluvial deposit and clothing them with gray osiers. But there was a river there, and in its spacious valley men had early settled down. They had ditched the meadows and ploughed up the best of them for tilled land, had set axe and fire to the roots of the giant trees, and one generation after another had widened its domain. Now the valley lay smiling under the southern sun, not over fertile, but rich and kindly enough, below the red farmsteads of the hill-slopes. The narrow fields with their changing crops were woven into a striped and chequered coverlet which in spring-time seemed of the finest and lightest texture possible. Even the little barns of the marshes gleamed silver-gray then, and looked like a scattered and resting herd. The land, however, was clayey and none too easy to work. It undulated still, not having arrived at the peace of the plains;

the rise and fall of it was like the arrested heaving of some broad and powerful breast.

Just above, the river took its last plunge, compressing its waters and roaring untamed both summer and winter. When the frost came, a white vapor rose there, which was swept forwards in the draught caused by the current and fell upon the banks as sleet before the snow itself arrived. The children would run in the mist, calling and laughing to one another, suddenly shivering and smiling merrily when they came out again and found each other with cheeks freshened by the cold, but hair grizzled as if with age. Down below, the river froze over, but was never really safe, on account of the ever restless and gently eddying forces in its depths. Not seldom some one was drowned there, but they had to look much lower down the river for the corpse when spring came. When it was found, the arms might be stretched above the head, as when the last appealing cry was made to home and friends; they had stiffened so, convulsively clutching at all that was safe and dear. The coffin had to be made very long, and looked sinister and threatening, and the grave had to be large. To the children it seemed as if a cry would sound from it when the warmth and sunshine came to loosen all that the frost had bound.

The hills sloped down with very high walls of rock. Their tops were clothed with forest, but

since it was a difficult task to carry down unsawn timber from the upper slopes, or even to climb up to them, the trees were left untouched to grow and decay in their native wildness. The giant pines became bleached skeletons of trees where eagles sought to dwell, as their custom is, above the hard and prickly line of the fir tops. When all was muffled in white, the forest shone and glowed against the glass-green sky in the morning and evening sunshine like patterns of frost upon a window-pane, but much larger, for all the distance. A vast, strange, motionless world it was, the image of a dreamland remaining when the memory of all the wonders that had happened there had vanished.

The whole year long the rocks caught up every sound that took its birth among them, and tossed the echoes to and fro until they died away to human ears. When the farm-girl called home her cows by all their tender names, her calls would be re-echoed far within the rock until it seemed as if the fairy folk inside were also bringing in herds richer, larger, and more splendid than those of mortal men. Or as if in hollow and mournful tones they mimicked and mocked the sounds, or in hate and malice strove to lure the possessions of others into their hands. In all these different ways could the echoes be interpreted, according to the time and mood.

When the sleigh-bells jingled sharply in the frost on the way up to the fairy portal, and suddenly vanished round the bend, it sounded to the listeners' ears as if bells and sleigh had been borne right into the heart of the hill and continued to echo there from among winding tracks that were otherwise closed to mortal footsteps, or at least admitted of no journey back.

A sense of mystery and secrecy, born of a constant suppression and concealment of emotion as age after age had rolled by, came to dominate the feelings of all. The voices of the people took on a deep and husky tone that lingered in the ear. Their eyes under the compact eyebrows gazed pensively forwards in sober and as it were ceremonial peace in the simplest duties of their daily toil. The lips were kept tightly closed, and their silent owners seemed ever to be listening to voices from within.

A strong race flourished there, a people trained to self-mastery but quick to heed the inward motions of the soul, silent in its activities, still more silent in its joy.

II

One day a man died there, and as several mishaps had already shaken the prosperity of that house, the children had now to leave their home and seek service among strangers. The eldest

daughter's name was Ingert; she was not yet quite full-grown, but bade fair to be tall and strong and handsome. She came to a neighboring farm where the master of the house was young and unmarried, and had his mother living with him. It was a well-respected, comfortable dwelling, and she found a good home there. More and more charges devolved upon her in proportion as her strength and intellect ripened, and this made her easier in mind, since now she felt she had her duty to fulfil, though otherwise it vexed her much that she had fallen from her independent state and must now do another's bidding. Hardest of all was it to be in that position so near home, where those who saw her might be thinking the same thoughts as herself, so that she had to guard herself against their suspected pity.

At length the two young people began to take an interest in each other. They showed it neither by look nor word, rather they became more distant and almost surly in their manners. Both concealed their feelings with a kind of uneasiness which grew more shy and proud as their affection ripened. Why it should be so they did not clearly realize, any more than they would have asked why the cloud-shadow came, bringing wind and cold; it was there, and one only wrapped one's garment closer round one. Did they probe their inner natures at all, it seemed to them that love like theirs

could find no answering love so deep and strong: that was as hard as for a storm to blow from two different quarters at once. In their humility they thought that they could never inspire in each other any such emotion as they felt, yet neither would have been content with anything less genuine in the answer than in the call. The girl, too, found her poverty a hindrance to any thoughts of marriage.

For the rest it was happiness enough just to live at each other's side and let their daily labors fill the hours in peace of conscience. For long years they would hardly have thought of requiring anything more. Nor would the young man have wished to go against his mother, who had no desire to see a daughter in the house. She had a cancer in the breast, and knew that her days were numbered. The short time she had yet to live she wished to pass undisturbed, feeling her will rule strong and firm until the hour came when it must break up and pass away. Darkly yet bravely she looked on life, and would have no mask of joy to hide it. It could play on in its own fashion when she was gone, she said, but she herself refused to smile and twist her mouth any more, knowing well how little that was worth. She took a fancy to Ingert precisely on account of the girl's silence, which she believed to be grounded in the same coldness as her own, and was kinder to her than to others since

she received no unnecessary confidences in return. And so passed the days until she died.

But now the young man—Gabriel was his name—knew that if he ever was to speak at all it must be in connection with the changes following upon his mother's death. Yet this offended his sense of what was fitting, for after such a loss it seemed ungrateful so soon to fill the gap and turn sorrow into gladness. His mother had filled a great place and left a vivid and impressive memory behind her; even the curious chilly feeling of the air in the rooms had something pure and still about it that ought not to be disturbed. The dead woman was among them yet, and her spirit must not be frightened out into the darkness to gaze through the window at others in their joy.

This alone he could do and must do: he would talk to Ingert and ask if she were willing to remain in the house, though he was now alone, and take control in place of his dead mother. Time would then have a chance to bring with it that which was to follow, if indeed it ever came at all.

But when he put his question to her, with voice well under control and not a word too many, he could not at the same time control his glance. It smiled at and caressed the possibilities of the future; a gleam came into his eye as they stood there on the front doorstep on that March evening,

looking out over the snow with the spring light upon it. And Ingert saw the gleam.

Now Ingert was very proud and thought rapidly and clearly.

He has never looked at me so before, she reflected: he thinks I am pretty, he knows I am poor, and he would have me stay here alone with him. Had he thought any more of me, had he meant anything further, he would have said so now. It might be my shame to stay, for I could deny him nothing if he asked me right. Or even if he only made believe to love me. I know what ideas a man might take into his head if we got used to living here quietly alone together.

And just because her own love was so deep, she put a tighter curb upon her inward feelings. She knew quite well that if things turned out as she had feared, with a man of honor like Gabriel it would lead to marriage. Or, if she played her cards well, she might draw him on in perfectly honorable fashion, notwithstanding her poverty. But this happiness, if indeed the word were fitting, should not be won with the slightest guile or meanness—not by her, and not with him, although as far as others were concerned she looked upon such matters with the absence of prejudice common in her circle. Now I must pluck up courage, she thought, and there and then she found it in abundance and her resolve stood fast.

"No," she answered, "I will not stay."

The gleam died out from Gabriel's eyes. He, too, cast up accounts with his love, and came to hard and serious conclusions.

There's no answering love in her, thought he, and I had never expected it, either. Only that perhaps one day . . . . But that was not so certain. She is right, and if she feels that way, 'tis best to break off here and now.

And after that it was more impossible than ever for him even to let her catch a hint of his real meaning. Their farewells were curt but friendly. As good master and good servant they parted, but very heavy were the steps that led them from each other.

III

Ingert would not stay in the neighborhood. To be there, drifting farther and farther from him as time went by, to see him take a wife, to dance at his wedding, meet his children—these things she could not do. Should chance once more bring them together, her shame would threaten her anew, for now more than ever she felt that it was to him she belonged. She went away in search of another place, some distance down the river, and therefore farther south, among the plains.

She found work with a peasant named Nils. He had much land and many laborers under him, was respected by all, and was an upright, sober

man. Not long before she came, he had been left a widower with one little son.

He thought very highly of the stranger who went about her work with quiet dignity and yet achieved more than others in their mirth. She seemed to belong to another circle than that of her fellow-servants, although without voluntarily holding herself aloof from them. But what made it seem so, apart from the disposition Nature had given her, and the still slightly rankling memory that she was born in another class, was her love and her longing for the one she had left behind.

Had he felt as I do, she thought, he would have followed by now and fetched me back; and I should have gone with him at once. For 'tis there with him I am now, though I seem to live here. Every night it must be there I go, though afterwards I have no memory of what I saw. His voice I still hear in my waking hours, with the strange echo that clings up there to every tone. I should be less tired if my feet could really wear themselves out on the paths to his home. It is well that no chance brings him near, for then would my fate be sealed. This can go on no longer: I must, I must forget.

So when in course of time her master asked her if she would be his wife, she turned pale instead of red.

Fate will have it so, she mused. She means well

and kindly by me, and if she bows my head so as to hurt me, it is but that I may see my salvation. Only in duty have I yet found my rest, even when that rest was scanty and soon disturbed. If I now take my duty still more seriously, I know that it will yield me more, although it cost more also. Then I must learn to rule my thoughts, and even in my secret heart I shall be as I ought to be. The man who offers me his hand has never thought otherwise than highly of me. More than I can give he has not required—my life shall be his. The old life must die. It shall be put far, far away from me, and the way to it shall be forever closed.

So she accepted his offer and in due time became his wife. As such, she behaved just as before, and was not a whit less silent and serious. Many thought she took pride in her place, but as this pride was not ill-suited to the quiet dignity of her young nature, she forfeited no respect on that account.

It was some months before the news reached her native village. All this time Gabriel had been restless and disturbed, though no one knew the reason. To sit brooding over lost happiness was not his nature, nor was it so that this upland people looked on life. They demanded much of themselves, and should that not suffice to bring peace, they made still further demands and pressed on. So it was with Gabriel.

In order to fill up the time, since the winter's work would leave a good many hours on his hands, he took to adding to his farm, though it was already too large for him. Needless extravagance of this kind was no more unusual then in these northern districts than it is to-day, and if any wondered why he did so all alone, they never went beyond the supposition that he felt it difficult to keep on living with the memory of his mother in the house. He himself let the explanation pass. He was unwilling to call in aid, and with his own hands fetched every log of wood from the forest. There he heard how every blow of the axe against the frozen wood, ringing clear in the frosty air, called forth answering sounds from far within the hills, where the chains of the wood-sledge also rattled. It was as if, alongside of his building, another was growing up in a region hidden from mortal view, some enterprise like his own, mysterious and dark in purpose, but greater and mightier, as everything is greater behind the doors of the unknown.

Sometimes he would say to himself: I have let my happiness go from me, and now I am building for it a house that will always be empty. But still I will get it ready. What are they building in there? Is their lot like ours? But what do I know of my lot! Perhaps Fate wills that one day the house shall not be empty: Ingert may feel as I do. Then she will come back, and the cottage shall shine to

welcome her and tell her that she has never been out of my thoughts. On, then! But anyhow 'tis well to work oneself tired and sleep well.—He had got the roof on and the rooms were now ready, white-washed, and echoing in their emptiness.

Then came the news of what had happened. And now he could saw and plane no longer, and the hours dragged heavily. I cannot stay here, said he: I have nothing to think of, nothing to see to now. She did not care for me, and she can never come back.—He realized that it was for her alone he had been building, and that all the time a mighty hope had been inspiring his labors.

He forged a lock and set it on the door, and that done, there was no longer anything to bind him to the place.

I will go and seek her, he resolved. It can make no difference to her, for she can never have given a thought to me and mine. I will say that I have become poor, and have had to go out to work as she did before. She will find me work if she can, for we parted friends. In those days I was happy if I could only be in her presence. I can be just as happy now, for she was no nearer to me then. Or I may be wretched—but no matter, so that I can be where she is.

So he left his farm to others, said that he wished to see something of the world, and vanished. No one knew where or wherefore, but his explanation

was accepted. Such things had happened before in those parts. Men in sudden weariness and desire for change had let go all that they had as of little worth, in order to prove that which they knew not, and which therefore seemed worth living for.

IV

One morning a stranger seeking work came to Nils as he labored in the forest.

Standing there in the snow, changing posture with unconstrained and easy motions, the stranger looked at the peasant with a deep and searching gaze before revealing his errand. It was as though he wished to weigh the other and see what manner of man he was ere he made any request; and this pleased Nils, who knew his own worth and required worth in others also.

There was work to be had, and there and then the stranger was able to show what he could do. None could come near him in strength and skill, and Nils resolved to engage him as his man when he had asked his history and received satisfactory answers to confirm his good impressions. The man shared the laborers' food, and in the evening went with the team home.

Ingert stood on the hearth and saw them come in, a silent file, axe in hand, entering with the long and gentle strides with which they had marched through the forest. First came her husband, then

the others in order of age, and lastly, when the door was about to be closed, the stranger.

She turned pale, and her look stole past him so swiftly that she seemed not to have marked him at all. He stood motionless, with a subdued trembling, while the other mute figures laid down their tools and formed a circle round the fire.

Now, Gabriel had meant to feign surprise, to go and speak to her with every gesture well under control, and tell her how strange it seemed to him to find her there. At her question he would then repeat the story he had got by heart. She would sympathize in a half distant manner, and perhaps with some annoyance, too, since their positions were now so curiously reversed; but, anyhow, it would be pleasant to receive her patronage and hear her voice again. But in the blaze of the firelight he saw only her glance, her paleness, and her trembling; something seized his heart with an iron grip, and kept back every word. Least of all could he have let his first words, his first gestures, before her be a lie. He had not reckoned with that.

"I have brought a man with me from the forest, as you see," said Nils.

Not even then did Ingert look at him. She gazed at the quivering shadow behind and above him, and quaked at the thought of hearing his voice.

Long ago now it had faded from her dreams, but there would still be about it those echoes of the past.

"I see," was her only answer.

"I mean to have him here," continued her husband, "since there is a place empty and he wants work. See that he has what he needs."

The affair being so simple, Nils never troubled to notice how his words were received. This was a matter that belonged to his domain, and a brief explanation was enough. Had he looked at his wife he would have been surprised.

Ingert turned paler than ever, and made a little movement towards her heart, as though something had pierced it. But she forced the hand down again before it could reach her bosom. This was done in broken jerks, and not without a struggle. She mastered, too, the tones of her voice before she answered, but still they sounded expressionless and curt.

"Very well, I'll see to it."

Nils paid no heed to her manner, tired as he was, and unsuspecting. The others thought: She doesn't like this to have come so suddenly, and perhaps it vexes her that he should have managed it by himself. She has a will of her own, we know.— But they found nothing very remarkable about the whole affair.

Gabriel stood motionless and unobserved, gaz-

ing and gazing as she turned once more to the fire that blazed high behind her with the fuel she had thrown on to occupy her trembling hands.

Why should she turn so pale, thought he. Is she vexed? Doesn't she like to be reminded of the time when I was master of the house? I ought to have thought of that. It isn't kind of her, now that she sees me poor. Not even to speak to me! But, anyhow, I understand, and I must go. But no, there is something more. What is it that has caught her heart, just as it gripped mine? Is it the same thing? God in heaven, have I been mistaken? Is my misery far, far greater than I thought? Or is it not joy instead, joy in sorrow, joy such as I shall never reach, but joy anyhow?

In the columns of sparks from the fire, the red embers that glowed like a fairy castle and crumbled to pieces like corrupting limbs from which life has long since fled, he saw their ruined future, their hard and bitter fate. All that evening he sat with his eyes upon the flames, in bitterness and woe, in pain and solemn mourning. But he was not quite sure that he had guessed aright, and could not come to a resolve. In his weariness and under the enchantment of the fire he seemed also to have a right to the poor joy that had become his own. As she passed to and fro, without even appearing to notice that he was there, his ears followed her steps, guessed at her hidden heart-

throbs, and even had an inkling of her buried thoughts.

But Ingert was thinking: He loves me. Why else should he have come? All is over with me now; I can never find peace any more. My life will burn away down there in the fire on that hearth.— When she was alone in the room with Nils and could speak freely, she said:

"You ought not to have that man here."

He was surprised. The matter was done with and already forgotten.

"What do you mean? Why not?"

"You know nothing about him. I don't like it."

More she could not say, for even to hint at what had been between them would be to open all her soul, lay bare her heart's wound. At the moment of confession all would be over between her husband and herself, and she had her duty and her marriage vow to think of.

For the first time Nils was annoyed with her.

"That's my business," he answered. "He has told me all he needed, and he has my promise, too."

By that she understood that his decision could not be altered and that she must submit to it, however impossible that might seem. She lay awake the whole night thinking.

Perhaps he will go away of himself, she pondered. But no, he will not do that. We have parted once, but this is for ever, for life and death. My

duty is to drive him away, whether there is any hope or not. As things have come about, not a word must be exchanged between us. Not a look must show what we were, and still are, to one another. The time is past when words could have helped. There is fire between us now, and however it may burn and eat away the heart, not a gesture must reveal the pain.

V

Next morning she was pale from lack of sleep, but held herself erect and went about her duties. To the stranger she spoke not a word as she handed him his food with the others.

His heart was aching with resigned sorrow, and her gift felt humiliating and heavy in his hand.

I was wrong, of course, thought he; that was only a foolish dream yesterday. It's annoyance she feels. But if I am nothing to her, my being here can matter little compared with what it means for me to see her face. Besides, how could I go away without a word? There is no help for it: even if I never found out the truth I should have to come back again. That fire in the evening draws me to it like a bird of night.

The others thought: It was as we supposed. She has a grudge against him. She cannot bear to have him in the house without her sanction.

Nils came to the same conclusion. I should never

have thought it of her, said he to himself. But that's the way of women. Perhaps I was wrong in denying her—pooh! it can't be helped now, and it will pass, like everything else.

But it did not pass, and matters became no different. For almost a year the stranger went to and fro about his work with the other people of the farm. He did not spare himself, he strained every nerve to do his best, and none got through as much work as he. In the house he took up little room, and made no attempt to push himself forward.

But all in vain! The goodwife would never speak to him or look at him. When she had to hand him his portions of food, she did so without any marked unfriendliness but in silence, as if he were not a human being but one of those supernatural and mysterious creatures to whom it was the custom in olden times to offer the sacrifices of the house on feast-days. In equal silence he received her gifts, and seemed to find no strangeness in her behavior. He merely bent his head, and when there was a fire on the hearth he would sit staring into it, serious, but as it seemed contented, buried in his thoughts and dreams.

And this was what he was thinking and dreaming:

He was not there among the rest, he did not see Ingert's movements as her comely, pale, and some-

what proud figure passed to and fro in the large room: he only heard her there. His inner vision swiftly forged images out of the impressions that his ears received. Every night he withdrew to the farm that he had left empty and unfinished amid the winter snows, far away among the hard and frozen hills. Nor was he alone there; all that he had craved and been denied in life was with him. The silent woman who possessed his soul and would not even lower her gaze to meet it, looked upon him now with clear, deep, radiant eyes; here, too, she talked with him. They wept and rejoiced together. The spell that lay upon them was broken, life would begin afresh here. But all was not yet ready for that; with glad but measured steps would they go to meet it. All the plans which he had never brought to completion but had left behind him to freeze up, as it were, like unborn souls, now came to their fulfilment. Far finer than any he had ever seen or dreamed of were the household articles that were to fill the rooms, as they now took shape under his loving care: they were rich and splendid as the treasures of the gnomes who began their building with his. One by one they were ready, and every time he and she rejoiced like two children over their possessions, and admired them for long together. But just then part of the dream fabric would escape his grasp and vanish, or the whole space between them might

stand empty. That surprised him not at all. It is always so with happiness, he thought; one cannot hold it fast in its completeness and entirety. Besides, he would have to do still better to make things worthy of her: there was no lack of time. To work once more, then, and with a good courage! Such a dear and holy task it was! . . . . And never tiring, he began his dream-labors anew.

He would sit with a quiet smile, the glow of reflected fires in his eyes. Never were the evening hours too long for him.

But every morning, when he met Ingert, he flashed upon her a swift, inquiring, beseeching look: Will it come soon? Have you forgotten how it used to be? And although she turned away, he saw that his glance had struck home; a pale gleam would light up her face, and her hand would twitch in a speedily arrested movement upwards.

I am tormenting her, thought he. Whatever be the reason, a great thing or a small, the same steel has pierced both our hearts. I should never have come here, and I must not stay.

But all the day he longed for her, and was drawn back again. He was as if bewitched, and felt that his will was no longer in his power.

I have met my fate as it has been meted out to me, he thought; and I do not complain, either, for I have her near me. All this of course means nothing to her; it is only her wounded pride. I was

her master, and I remind her of days she would rather forget.

The whole situation, too, had become a habit which could not be broken.

Nils and the other members of the household had also grown accustomed to the atmosphere which the stranger had brought with him into the house, and for the most part were not aware of any difference. In order to make her coldness to him less noticeable and to clear it from suspicion, Ingert had become very sparing in her words to all, speaking no more than was necessary. It is her nature, they thought, and they found her comely in the pride and dignity of her youth, and hardly wished her otherwise, especially as there was nothing lacking in the performance of her duties.

To her husband's child she now transferred all that could find no expression elsewhere. She became the tenderest of mothers to the boy, but a mother without gladness, giving, but expecting nothing in return. When he was sick, she would carry him to and fro for hours, soothing him to sleep and listening to his moaning and the sound of her own measured steps. Then she would sit oblivious of everything, rocking him in her arms as if it were a grief she bore, staring out over his flaxen head towards the shadows as they thickened, and the darkness that swept up from the

floor like a river in flood. If she were called away, it was with regret and as though torn from some pleasant task that she laid down her burden. The child was fond of her in return, but in his own fashion. He attached himself to her, but seldom smiled in her presence. He grew quiet and thoughtful, as though he had caught in the grave and terrifying future a glimpse of the world in which his elders lived.

Nils thought still more highly of his wife because she acted thus by his motherless boy, and could see no fault in her, though it did sometimes surprise him that their life had grown so strangely ceremonial. But that did not displease him, either, for his was a slow and deliberate nature, entirely taken up by the performance of duty.

And so passed the time for them all.

VI

One day, when winter had come again, something happened.

They were out in the woods, felling trees. There had been a heavy snowfall, which, beginning in mist and rain, had cleared the air for a sharp frost afterwards. The snow had therefore collected upon the branches of the tall fir trees in heavy masses which hung there like monstrous slumbering creatures, and gripped so firmly with their sluggish limbs that hardly anything was shaken off by

the blows of the axe on the iron-hard wood. Nils forgot to take into account this extra weight, and stayed too long hewing at the roots of a great tree. All at once the trunk snapped like a glass rod and fell right over him.

The others heard the crash follow too close upon the last stroke, and all understood the danger, but none found time to think what was to be done. Only the stranger sprang forwards, swift as a bird of prey, caught his master to him just as the falling trunk was grazing his head, hurled him to the ground beneath his own body, and so saved him. But he could not draw away his hand quickly enough. The tree caught it, and the end of an old broken twig in the bark tore in it a deep, wide gash.

Nils rose to his feet and stared in confusion at his rescuer before he could realize the full extent of his indebtedness. Even then, in the midst of his gratitude, he was amazed at the stranger's appearance.

Gabriel, pale but with shining eyes, stood with a curious, hard smile upon his features, watching his blood run down upon the white snow. Not a feature was distorted by the pain; on the contrary, his sufferings seemed to bring him satisfaction and relief. He stared at the red drops as they fell, as though they had formed a writing the sense of which was of grave importance for him and fur-

nished the answer to a host of questions. His lips moved gently, and he said within himself: "It was so, then! I ought to have done it, and I did. I have learned to know myself."

He was as far away from all about him as when he sat every evening by the hearth, and was rapt in his dreams now as then.

There was no question of thanks, for these men were wont to be sparing of their words and feelings, but Nils touched the damaged hand with something akin to reverence as he examined the cut. He advised a speedy return home. It might be dangerous, he said, if the cold got into the wound.

The stranger's eyes flashed at the mention of going home alone, and now his comrades noticed how white the accident had made him. But he fought down his weakness, his look became calm, and he was himself again. He would not listen to the proposal, the blood could flow as long as it liked, and only against his will would he afterwards consent to have his hand bound up. "Time enough to see to it at night," said he.

When they came home it was the goodwife's task to dress the wound. In a few words they told her what had happened and what the stranger had done.

Now she will surely speak to him at last, was the general thought; now at any rate the silence will be broken. And for this reason they all gazed

expectantly upon her. Gabriel tried to keep in the background and hid his hand as if in shame, the clotted blood and ice rustling at every movement. But he was pushed forwards to meet her in the firelight.

Ingert was deadly pale. It seemed as if she realized the full extent of the averted peril; it was clear, too, they thought, how the idea of her threatened loss affected her. Ingert was pale as death, and could not now control her trembling.

Her eyes opened wider and wider, her breathing became short and strong, and there was a quivering at once violent and restrained about the corners of her mouth, as though some agitated and bewildered speech were trying to break forth. But she kept back the words. She did not even look at the stranger, only at his hand.

There must be something hard and cold as ice about her, they said to themselves, and turned away their looks in some vexation. The two stood there as if alone, amid the silence and the red sheen.

Ingert heated water, washed away the ice and blood, and took off the bandage. Thereupon the blood began to flow again. She was on the point of swooning at the sight, but silently she controlled herself and did what she had to do. She managed, also, well-nigh to subdue the trembling of her hands.

The injured man stood with a strange smile upon his face, just as when he was hurt; he, too, was very pale, but his face and eyes shone. It was as if he took pleasure in the pain when the bandage was taken off from the wound, but when she gently wrapped it up afresh, his mouth twitched and he nearly wept. When all was finished he remained holding out his hand, as if he would have liked to go through it all once more. It seemed to him then that her gesture for a moment hinted at an uncertainty as to whether her task was done. It might also mean that she, too, wished to remain at it a little longer. He was sure that her fingers trembled, but no more could he learn, for her eyes never once met his, and she soon withdrew.

All that evening Gabriel sat staring into the fire. He was feverish now, and his eyes shone brighter than ever. An expression of radiant joy kept passing over his features at the pictures that his mind's eye conjured up.

He was far away in the north again. The warm blood was dripping from his wound, and his heart grew light. Like the drops, his words poured forth wild and red, and now they found an answer. His beloved was not dumb there. "You acted right," said she. "Never would I have come here with you had you done otherwise. Now, now we have each other, and nothing mean can find root within our thoughts." . . . . But since his hand was injured,

he could not that evening build up as usual his palace of joy. Yet that made no difference, the hours were not long, and they two had the future before them.

When he went to rest he was as blissfully tired as a child can be with happiness and light.

Every time the wound was tended the same thing happened. There was no change in their behavior, everything was done in silence, at the suggestion of others. At last no further attention was needed, and then life was very empty for Gabriel. In the end the whole incident was forgotten, and even the general surprise at Ingert's hardness passed away.

Since the stranger had saved Nils's life, his departure was more than ever out of the question. He had his place there, and would belong there always. And all was as before till Christmas came.

VII

In Nils's family there was kept up an old custom which had formerly been common in that district.

When the master and mistress of the house set off for early morning church on Christmas Day, they would take formal leave of all the people on the farm, even though most of these accompanied them to service. The meaning of the act was that now, at this greatest of festivals, master and servant would free themselves from anything that

might have oppressed either side during the working days of the year. They wished to be quite free from every burdensome thought, with consciences clear and calm, when they appeared before their God and His infinite mercy. All the past should be laid bare before Him with its honest endeavors, which certainly might have come short in much and little, but had all the time been meant for the best. In a few simple words they prayed each other forgiveness for all that should have been otherwise, or, if the tears came too near, contented themselves with an eloquent hand-shake. In return they received thanks for the year that had gone and good wishes for the coming year. It set the mind at rest, and, without reflecting why, they sat during the journey and noticed how peaceful all the stars of night seemed in their infinitude. The more welcome for this ceremony were the brightly burning little lights with which the church was decorated, and the pale daybreak afterwards, with its promise of an approaching sun.

The custom was followed this year, too. Nils went the round of the well-lighted room, looked confidingly into the eyes of all, shook hands with confidence, and said what he had to say, briefly, but quietly and with assurance. Something childlike passed into the sincerity of this otherwise so dignified and somewhat taciturn man, and like a child's was their answering trust.

The last in the circle was Gabriel. His master's grasp closed over the scar left by the wound.

"I know best," said he, "what you have been to me this year. Between us two all is well."

The stranger returned his gaze with a look as calm and honest as his own. He answered that it was so, and gave his master his good wishes and his blessing for the journey. He himself would not go with them, and now he drew back unobserved from the company and passed out of the room.

Nils went to get the sledge ready while his wife took her leave.

For Ingert this task was very hard. She shivered in her agitation, and the candle-lights pricked her like needles. Certainly she had meant well by all and had done her duty, but more than that she had not been able to do. Cold and proud the uninitiated must have thought her, and that pained her now more than ever. It was some relief, however, to perceive that Gabriel had gone, for to him she could not even that morning say a word.

Very pale, she passed with rapid steps from one to the other. The clear, steady lights shone round her; she was lovely but delicately frail, and the thought came to every one that the past twelve months had taken more out of her than a year should take. She is too young for her task, they thought: it cannot last long. She could not say much, but she gazed and gazed, and from her eyes

even these unobservant natures could divine something of what was passing in her soul. The sorrow and secret discipline of a whole year loomed darkly behind their lustre.

"Believe me, oh, believe me!" she seemed to wish to say. "It was not I, not my own will. Fate held her hand upon my neck, and for fear of being crushed to earth, I had to hold myself stiff. Your feelings, whatever they have been, were as nothing, ah, nothing to mine!"

The tears were not far off, but she was happy, as one who may at least half speak out the burden laid so crushingly upon him.

"Have I been a good mistress to you?" she asked; and, amazed at their own emotion, they answered: "Yes, indeed, ma'am, that you have. And take our thanks for all you've done." And they gave her their sincere and hearty blessing.

At last only the child was left.

She knelt down before the boy, who stood in his corner with wide-open, frightened eyes, watching all that went on. And now the tears were still nearer flowing. She held both his hands and spoke to him in rapid, impetuous, and for the most part incomprehensible words.

"I have not made your life happy," said she; "but I could not, I had no happiness to give. It is not every one who has that, as one day you may come to learn for yourself. But one must bear up

all the same. Have I at least been anything like a good mother to you, you who have no mother? Can you give me thanks for the year that has gone? I shall not fail, I shall hold out as I have done hitherto. And if—which may God forbid—you ever come to see into my heart, you will know that I could do no more, and will pardon what was lacking."

The boy stared at her in amazement. In the dark and silent weaving of the bond between them he had already understood enough to make the tears now start forth.

"Mother has been good," stammered he between his sobs, as he pressed shyly to her, "mother has been good."

"But you must say 'thank you,' too. I will say it for you; we will speak together."

But unwittingly she clasped her hands as she did so, and, struggling with her sobs, spoke her thanks to some one else in a tone that frightened the boy, so that his answering words became a shriek. She had to soothe him to rest on her bosom.

When she arose it was with an air of relief and liberty. "So now I have stood my test, and there it lies behind me with all the other shadows." But she went out quickly without looking round for any one whom she might have forgotten.

Nils was ready and had the torch alight. Now

he held it up to her, and looking earnestly at her, asked:

"Have you taken leave of all of them in the house?"

The color that the air had brought into her cheeks, after all her recent conflict of emotions, faded away as swiftly as the darkness round her, but she answered calmly, "Yes."

"Of Gabriel, too?"

She trembled, and the corners of her mouth twitched with pain.

"He was not inside."

"Then go and look for him. You must not forget any one."

"Think what you're doing! Don't drive me to it! Think well what you're doing!" Her voice became strangely deep. Her husband was amazed to see how large and black and desperate-looking were her eyes, as he stood holding the light up to them. The flame of the torch was caught by a puff of air, the darkness itself became red and low. The frost sparkled and groaned upon the ground.

"Nothing must be hidden and forgotten any longer," he answered firmly. "We must be free from everything when we come before God."

He could not give way in this matter. He had done so many times during the year, when he had begun to touch upon the subject, but had checked

himself because every time she had pressed her hand to her heart, as if something had pierced it. He had thought then: It is on my account, that I could go against her. But a wrong had been done to the stranger, and on this day that must be the all-important thing.

Ingert stood looking at him, pondering on his words.

"Nothing must be hidden or forgotten, you have said. You know best, of course."

She peered into his face to see if his purpose held, but besought him no longer. Rather, there was something like a threat in her look.

But as he stood there firm and motionless, with no intention even of repeating what he had said, a wild flame lit up the darkness of her eyes, a strange light of joy and pain which he could not comprehend. He did not recognize her. Her soul was no longer there. Had he spoken, she would not have heard him, for she was listening to something far away, a voice that ensnared and fettered her with its deep, mysterious tones.

"I will go, then," said she. And swiftly, but as though borne by an unseen power rather than of her own will, she passed into the house.

VIII

In order to be as far away as possible, Gabriel had withdrawn to the men's sleeping-room, and

he was alone. A tiny light was burning, but the dark night came in through the window-panes. It was cold and cheerless.

He sat on his bed and thought of all this and of how his year had passed, and he shivered. He longed for them to be ready so that he could go to the kitchen hearth again. There, perhaps, he might get his dreams back and be almost happy as Christmas morning came on. Then he heard her steps and recognized them.

He knew at once that the footsteps were for him, and he thought: Now she comes to speak to me: they have made her do it. She can only have one thing to say—that I must go, that I cannot stay here. And I have been expecting it for a whole year. Of course I must obey her, but what shall I then have left in all the world?

He sat motionless, straining his eyes in the direction of the door, half fearful, half triumphant. Now at last he would receive the wages he had earned, although so poor a wage that he must needs smile at it. But now at least he would exist for her. Man to woman he would face her at last, before memory alone was left him.

Her hand was on the latch. The door opened and closed, but Gabriel did not stir.

She must drive me away, thought he. Not one of her words will I waste. They are too precious

for that, since they are all that I shall have. And I have waited long enough for them.

She went straight up to him. Her steps were very swift, she almost ran. Her face gleamed pale in the dusk, but there was something else in her look, he knew not what.

When she was close beside him, she opened her mouth to speak, but no sound came. She had grown so used to forcing back the words in his presence that now her lips refused to do her service. Her hands felt at her breast, were checked as usual, trembled, and were still. The thousand darts that she had suffered in silence now made their stings felt anew. Her face contracted, and all was prepared for a struggle.

Then she let the inevitable come.

Her hands flew up to her heart and gripped at it as though they wished to drive in still deeper all the pain she felt, they clutched convulsively, as if to arrest a stream of blood. It was infinite torture to her not to be able to speak.

Now the tightened lips moved, and then it came.

But still no words, hardly a human sound. She burst out into a wild cry of relief, a tempest of ecstasy that at last the silence was broken, but at the same time there was a note of anguish at something new, something mightier than all the rest. And she tottered and sank to the floor.

But before she reached it Gabriel had risen and

thrown his arms around her. He remained standing, though his burden grew very heavy.

Her head was close to his, her hands stroked his face with trembling and convulsive movements, her panting breath caressed his lips. She prayed him forgiveness for all, she mourned over their common sorrow, smiled at their present joy, made confession of a whole year of pain and love at which her heart had bled.

She had no words to do it with, only her hands, which she still had the power to move. In the end—for all passed so quickly—she had but her soul, and she breathed it out in a strange, long-drawn sigh close to his mouth. Then she grew quite still.

Gabriel had kissed and kissed her in a transport of exultation and tears. He felt himself in the presence of an ineffable joy, and all the long way to it, as well as every other hard and painful thing, was forgotten in the glory that was about them. But he saw at once what had happened, stood upright, and listened in silence.

It could not be otherwise, the thread could be drawn no finer. And so must they two meet. He did not even know what he felt, but only that it was so. But he could not let her go, now that at last he bore the sum of his desires in his arms, and he stood gently rocking her while his gaze passed out beyond her shoulder towards the darkness and the frosty stars of night.

IX

Having grown tired of waiting, Nils had come to fetch his wife.

By then the stranger was sitting on the bed, so as to have one hand free to caress her. He rocked her to and fro like a child, and met the husband's eyes with the look he was accustomed to wear in the evenings by the fire.

To the mute amazement of his master he paid no heed, but only stroked Ingert's hair away from her forehead and showed, as he fondled it, how white and changed her face had become.

"She is dead," he said at length. And at Nils's terrified and expressionless repetition of the word: "She is dead, as you see. She came to me in the end."

And he rocked her and pressed her to him as before, without caring in the least who it was that saw him.

As the husband stood dumbfounded, incapable of thought, he went on, still rocking her to and fro:

"I loved her, you know, long since. That was why I came here. I hoped for nothing, and I got nothing, not even a word. I only wanted to be near her, and that wish was granted. Her life she could not give me, so she came to me in death. She is mine now."

Still Nils understood nothing. He could not

even believe that she was really dead. The whole thing was so incomprehensible.

"What have you done to her?" he asked, stepping threateningly forward. "Let her go! Give her to me!"

But Gabriel merely sat rocking his burden, and turned upon the other a strangely calm gaze that cooled his anger.

"What should I have done to her? Wasn't it you who sent her here? You have given her to me, and now she is mine; no one can take her back again. She has kept silent so as not to break her marriage vow, I see it at last. But I never knew before what it cost her. Her silence tightened round her heart, for it was mine long ago and yearned towards me. At last the bonds were broken, but they had been drawn too close. The heart could not bear its freedom, everything had grown too mean for it. So it broke in that same moment: and what else could it have done? She is happy now; we are both happy. I haven't shed a tear."

At last Nils began to understand. He called to mind her last looks and words, and struggled with his tears. He felt himself shut away from her by the stranger's gaze, and that hurt him. But his own sorrow, however deep and great he felt it, was too small to venture forth here.

"It is you that have killed her," he moaned.

"Perhaps you are right, but what matter now? Look at her!" And Gabriel once more stroked her hair and pointed out that she seemed to smile. "Don't you see that it's with joy? More than joy, Fate itself?"

Nils saw, and he shivered, still more abstracted than before in his own blind grief.

"If it be as you say," said he; "if it be as you say . . . ."

But he did not doubt, nor yet did he know what was to follow in his thoughts.

The stranger calmly linked his words on to his master's.

"Then this is also mine, this that is left of her. You won't refuse her that?" And as the husband blanched at the strangeness of his request, he added:

"I will take her to the place where she was born and bred. It is there she should rest easiest. I have a farm there, and had built a new one, but I left it empty when word came that she would never live in it. And now she shall lie there on her bier. Every night I have sat and gone on building while I listened to her footsteps, but of this I never dreamed. But now the house will suit her as it is. Bare, clean boards. It is ready, and she must come home."

And the husband gave his promise, constrained by the other's look and by his own feeling of insig-

nificance before this great, half-understood, unfathomable thing. When Gabriel rose and released his precious and heavy burden, it was to make ready for her last journey.

The torches had burnt down unobserved in all this confusion and terror. The stars, too, were extinguished. The light of Christmas Day broke more solemn and cold in its gray paleness than ever in years gone by. Over whitened fields and frozen water-courses the procession slowly took its way towards the spot within the mountains where the sleigh-bells would echo among the rocks, as if there amid the reserve and constraint, the infinite strength and secrecy, a place was being made ready for something in Ingert's nature and fate.

THE WATER-FINDER

[*KÄLLORNA*]

FROM DE FYRA ELEMENTERNA

1906

The Water-Finder

IT SEEMS to me that Spring has never been so near my heart and eye as that time. Moreover, I was a boy then, and it was my first journey north.

During the last few weeks of school the year's awakening had, as it were, moved past me in the distance, borne upon brightening nights with flocks of migrating birds high up in the fading blue. The roar of the river sounded with a note ever more alluring, the chestnut buds flamed whiter and whiter in the sunlight, and the great tepid drops of rain brought disquiet where they fell.

If I walked outside the town, the wealth of Nature was already too abundantly displayed about me. The miracle is over, it seemed to say: you have come too late to see it. A whole long year and the dark winter's snow are between us ere you can try to capture me again, and even then you will succeed no better.

In the height of June I sat in the train and was borne towards the forests. There the foam-flecked river, rushing wide, showed the way to the unknown, and in wide blue heights, in fresh mountain air, it was about me, great and wonderful and dreamy. Suddenly I started in amazement, and

looked with eyes wide open at the nearest objects. I had managed to catch up the flying spring.

Thickets of birch and aspen stretched, light as clouds, along the tender green of the dales, under the still frozen twilight of the pine-woods, and before the river's shimmering blue. They seemed to have nothing material about them save their power to glitter and shine in the low sunlight which held them suspended on its beams, and to send out into the cool evening air their strong yet delicate perfume. Beneath them, among the brown leaves of last year, I caught a glimpse of flowers which I could not yet pluck and own. It was as though the spirit of one not long dead and deeply mourned had appeared again amid the circle of his loved ones, where already his memory had begun to be illuminated and transformed by the poetry of the irrevocable, and had stood there bright and smiling, gently whispering: "See, here am I! This is my self, which I could never give to you entirely. Look on me, but touch me not!"

The sun went down, but no darkness came with the night. I was borne along past silent lakes, on whose steep banks the leafy tree-tops raised their heads in wreath upon wreath of foliage; the same scent as before came from them, but there was no glitter now. Only a palely shining color in a thousand shades, and one or two stars low down, burning and trembling upon trembling twigs. No

sound but the noise of the rolling train and the echo that was lost behind us, and now and then a thrush that broke off startled in the midst of a trill.

One could not think that all this was real; the earth lay stretched and bound in a rapt prophetic transport, listening to herself and staring up into the light-blue spaces of heaven. Never again, it seemed, could she awake from her enchantment, and it was hopeless, though tempting, to guess at her riddles and secrets.

The journey came to an end, and lulled by the sound of some invisible waterfall—a gentle voice, I knew not whence, from all the strange, cool world about me in its fresh gray dew—I fell asleep.

When I awoke, the impressions of the night vanished as I made acquaintance with the fall and saw from what a wild and careless sport its voice arose. The spring which I had seized was about me even in full daylight, and there was also a new and strange country to explore.

It was a lovely district with high forest-clad hills, so gently sloping that they gave an air of combined grandeur and mildness, especially now, when the dark green foliage of the pine trees was giving place in every hollow to the shining, tender leaves of June. The river flowed slowly, ere it was caught in the giddy pace of the fall, and spread out into a number of wide lakes, gliding into one an-

other between points and islets. Three or four sheets of water, one above the other, could be seen from any piece of rising ground. The forest was impenetrable and wild, full of stones and bogs and fallen trunks; on the plains stretched for the most part desolate marshes, where goats browsed among swaying tussocks and black stunted trees. It was only along the water that the beauty began, or else when the whole was viewed in a single prospect, softened and shining in the sunlight that bathed it.

One evening I was present at a scene which sums up for me all my memories and impressions from that time.

There was a small farm on the slope down towards the river, built the previous autumn by a young couple who had moved into the district. It was so new that the house was not yet painted, and the timber had hardly been bleached by the sunshine. The sheds for the few cattle were not yet ready, there were neither paths nor fences; the whole farm lay cheerfully and as if in sport broadcast among the tender green. There was no well, either, and that was just the point now under discussion.

To choose the place for a well is not a task for every man, for intelligence and strength of arm are of little use unless one can also find the right place where the vein of water comes nearest to

the earth's surface and of itself, as it were, seeks the light of day. A special art of water-divining has been developed, though indeed "art" is hardly the right word, for nothing in it can be learned. The only implement, the dowsing-rod, is there for all, but not every hand can make it show its power. That is a gift that is supposed to run through certain families only, and every district has its own trusted diviner.

In this case it was a peasant named Grels Olofsson of By, and he was noteworthy in more ways than this. He had also the gift of curing many kinds of diseases and bodily injuries; he was "wise."

This property is, as a rule, bound up with primitive superstition and traditions from heathen times: the means employed are often absurdly crude, often also deeply poetic, and no doubt have their roots for the most part in old sacrificial customs.

With Grels it was not so. Superstition played no part in his methods. Certainly there lay beneath them a mysticism hardly suspected by himself, but the only expression it took was an intuitive glance into the patient's being, a naïvely contemplative imagination which, without anatomical knowledge, seemed to grasp immediately the coherence and secret life of the body. Imagination was, perhaps, the whole secret, for who knows how deep lie the

roots of this most mysterious of human faculties, and how much it can achieve? It is seen in all created things, it is perhaps the greatest positive force in the world. In poem and legend it roves at will, but it is also found silent and hidden in the workshops of Nature. In man it is perhaps mightiest where it finds least expression, and dwells nearest to that which has neither voice nor consciousness. So it was in this peasant, who had never withdrawn himself from the realities of life.

He rarely failed, and had never made any serious blunder, so that professional physicians received him not only with tolerance but with respect.

He was a solid, cautious, and determined man, who thought rapidly but spoke little and slowly, in all respects the most notable and influential person in the parish. He was rich, too, one might say, for he still owned his forest, but seemed never to have been tempted to make money out of it, and lived his life as simply and thriftily as the poorest. For his services he would receive no payment, though they often took up his busiest hours; he seemed to count them as a recreation, and it was with a calm and deliberate joy that he performed them. He had been for some years a widower and had two children living, a son and a daughter.

I had not seen him before, and I regarded him with curiosity as I waited in wonder and with a certain schoolboy superiority for the unknown cere-

mony. He was tall and still slender, though he would soon be an old man. His head was large and massively shaped, the eyes clear and untroubled as a child's, although the swift decision with which their glance was directed did not lack virility. Strong, too, was the mouth which the slightly grizzled beard left entirely exposed, yet no hardness could be discerned there, but rather a seriousness which seemed never to have been tempted to laughter.

He sat on the ground, listening in silence to the farmer's somewhat unnecessary story of how he had come to build just there, and of where he would prefer the well to be sunk. Now and again he looked past him with a friendly glance at the friendly little house, half lowered his eyelids, and let the sun shine full in his face with an obvious sensation of well-being, while with his strong laborer's hand he stroked the tender grass. He had come there over the lakes, rowed by his son and daughter, and had still upon him some impression of the journey, which may have been new for that year and was well-loved and familiar from of old. It must have been strange and wonderful enough that quiet evening. Every tree on the slope stood out clearly in the reflecting surface, every shining red farmstead smiled at its image, which seemed all the more cheerful for the shadows below. All was set in a single limpid expanse, a world of air and

water, both alike ethereal, with the bright and almost immaterial visions of the spring floating therein.

He was resting now, delighting in every breath he took, and collecting himself, as was his wont, ere the time of testing came. In spite of his alert appearance, which had nothing mysterious about it, he gave a curious impression of listening, and reminded one of those legendary figures who can hear the grass grow, and for whom the secret places of the earth lie open. Behind him was his daughter, picking flowers.

She was a girl of fifteen or sixteen, and the whole of her round little face was fresh and red as a cherry, though the spring sun had already tanned it slightly. The kerchief falling down over her shoulders exposed her nut-brown, curly hair; nut-brown, too, were her eyes, which were more than commonly wide open, had short lashes, and reflected the light. Her figure was supple and slender, as they are often found to be in woodland districts; in her violet-gray woolen dress she resembled one of the downy flowers of the season.

Grels stood up and went to the nearest thicket to cut a twig. He searched long and carefully, cautiously parting the catkins on the boughs, and when he had made his choice, the sap could be seen running out beneath the knife under the

smooth bark. He cut off the branch in such a way that it had the shape of a Y, tried it to see if it suited his grip, and looked about him to judge the ground. He seemed to find it promising and nodded to his son, who, in unwilling obedience to the gesture, now stepped up to his father.

"Try once again, Olof," said Grels. "You ought to be old enough now. Try again!" And he handed him the dowsing-rod. The young man took it, still against his will.

"What's the use?" he asked, but since his father's eye continued to admonish him, he held the twig away from him and began to walk in a slightly stooping posture.

He was a tall and powerfully built youth of eighteen, brisk and active, with a dark line of energy above the eyes, in other respects like his father, except that his mouth was larger and more mobile, and had about it something discontented, an air half of sullenness, half of desire.

He walked swiftly and impatiently down the slope, and seemed displeased to feel the eyes of all upon him.

The father followed him with his look.

"You're not stooping low enough, Olof," said he. "It's just as it was before. You'll never do it that way. You're thinking of something, and then no power can come."

Olof stopped short. "You know what I'm think-

ing about," he answered. "I've no taste for this, and I can't do it. I can't stand it any longer."

The sister's shrill voice called eagerly:

"Here, Olof, here! Why don't you come this way, boy? You can find it without any dowsing-rod, you can tell by the flowers. The vein must go here, where they are freshest. Can't you see?"

But he took no notice of her and handed back the twig so as to be freed from his task.

"All this is not for me," he said in a low voice. "You knew it before, and it will always be so."

Grels bent his clear and sober gaze disapprovingly upon him, but silently took the rod, and with eyes half-lowered to meet the light began his tour of inspection.

He held his hands close to his knees and walked very slowly, as though he were looking for something in the thin grass, passing up the slope and turning aside to follow the scarce visible depressions of the ground. The low sunshine enveloped his curiously groping movements and almost hid them from us, the gleaming boughs of the birch trees shone like glass in the thickets, and their half open leaves were shot through with gold. A gust of cool freshness and perfume was wafted through the evening air, and one could almost see the dew already falling where the flowers shone between gleaming stalks. Silently we all followed him at a distance, and even the farmer's young

wife, heavy with the child she bore and the confinement to the house in winter, had ventured out and smiled a melancholy, tired, yet hopeful smile upon the spring, the sunshine, and the well that was to be. A swift, merry, and metallic twitter passed through the air—it was the swallows that had just arrived and gratefully found a nesting-place upon the new-built house, consecrating it, as it were, to the joys and vicissitudes of life.

Slowly the dowsing-rod turned, as though by some mysterious power of its own, and pointed towards the ground: a glad cry of surprise rose from us all. But Grels went on, stooping and groping as before, magnified by the light into some unknown, mysterious, yet friendly power.

Suddenly he stopped, since the rod was swinging with short pendulous beats between his hands, which with their swollen veins and convulsive grip seemed hardly able to hold it longer. He pushed it into the ground as a mark,—the place was found. Then he rose, obviously exhausted, and mopped his forehead. There, too, the veins were swollen, and his skin was red under its tan.

He turned to the farmer. "No need to dig very deep here," he said, "but the water will be fresh and sweet all the same." And he smiled encouragingly at him and the young wife and their home. "May it be a blessing to you, and may there be many of you to drink long of it!"

They thanked him and spoke of returning his services, but he put their thanks aside. He wiped his forehead as though he was tired, and seemed to be debating with himself. Then in a firm voice he called his son to him.

"Go back now, both of you," said he. "I will stay here to see that the work is properly done."

This was doubtless his custom in such cases, for the girl smiled indulgently as at some familiar weakness. "It's a pity you won't come, father," she answered; "it's calmer than ever now, and it will be so lovely on the water." The son nodded obediently, but seemed to make inward objections to such a waste of precious time. And so they both went down to the boat.

Grels sat on the ground again and rested, with his brown hand caressing the grass as before, content to remain upon the spot and have his well-loved task to himself. He now first caught sight of the swallows, and with his clear glance followed the motion of their wings as they flashed against the blue. He seemed as happy as a man can be.

That gave me courage to speak to him. My imagination had been roused by the mystery of the scene. It had never before occurred to me to wonder where the water came from in wells and springs, or to think what it meant for our human race. The hazel-twig also was a riddle that my

scanty knowledge of magnetism left as dark as ever, in spite of the boldest speculations. Now I wished to know as much as he, and I began by hinting at my hypothesis and the knowledge I already possessed.

He looked at me and gently shook his head at my too elaborate wisdom.

"It needs water," was his answer. "Everything needs water to live. And so it tries to get down there after it, when it can no longer get it through the root. We can all of us find what we want, if we don't scatter ourselves over other things. If I planted it deep enough in the ground, that little twig, it would take root and become a tree again, for such power it has—a fine, strong tree. But this well will do more than that; it will give men their daily drink, and instead of a tree a race will branch out here."

"But where does the vein come from? Can you find one anywhere in the earth?"

It pleased him to hear my questions. He seemed to have often pondered them himself.

"All water comes from the clouds. It circulates during the ages like blood in a man's body. Mostly the rain goes straight to the rivers again, or stops in the turf for a time and does its work there, and is breathed out through leaves and stalks. But some of it goes deeper. Here under the ground"—and he patted it as he spoke—"there are lakes and

streams, too. You can see it best when you dig: there are layers of clay that will let nothing through, but in between them are stones and gravel that are always dripping with wet. They are lakes that the sun never shines on. Nobody sees them, but there they are, and they have their work to do; a current runs through them all the time and keeps renewing them. Without them there could be no life, the roots go down into them. Not even in the hardest frost, when all that we see is ice and snow, are these depths frozen. Sometimes the water runs out of itself into the daylight, in some cleft in the woods, and then becomes a stream that grows greater and greater till it forms a river and fall. But you have to dig for it as well, and then it may almost leap out to meet you, if there's pressure on it from the hills. That water's the freshest and clearest. It has been so silent and shut in down there, and like everything else it is glad to see the light."

Here was much for me to think about, much more than I could explain, especially that about the personal life that was in some way connected with our view of Nature. Nor did I stop at that, but everywhere I went I divined and almost heard the secret course of the water beneath the visible earth. The spring season about me thus became more fresh and more enchanting, and everything, even the deep, wild trills of the myriad thrushes

at evening seemed to speak of those silent and hidden powers that bore up the whole.

I saw Grels for a few days longer, working in silent contentment with spade and crowbar, wet through, and dripping with moisture and clay. When he stood deep down in the earth and thought himself alone, he would hum and sing to himself for joy. After all was finished, he went away.

Of the son I heard that the relations between him and his father were somewhat strained. He was not content with his station and work, or with the strangely quiet and suppressed life at home. People justified him to a certain degree, for he was a very intelligent, active, and industrious youth. He wished "to be something," to see and try the world, and he thought it foolish for them neither to sell their woods nor themselves to make money out of them. Against all this Grels set his calm and taciturn authority, so that it hardly ventured so far as a definite proposal, but he suffered from it none the less, both out of love for his boy and also from anxiety as to what might happen after his own death. But all this was hearsay to me, for I met none of the family again that summer.

Four years later I came back to the neighborhood. Much had happened there, people had died, and others had come to the spot, but on the whole there was little change. The same thrushes sang

the same songs, eternally new, in the thickets; the spring-tide green shone just as light and golden in the evenings. At night the landscape lay just as pale, staring into the distance at the same high heaven, while the voice of the fall sounded as inexplicable as ever in its untamed force.

The well that Grels had opened now displayed itself like all the others with its sweep sharply outlined against the sky. Around it life had blossomed richly.

The red cottage glowed cheerfully with the showiest of geraniums and balsams behind the window-panes; in front lay a little garden with all the bushes in it that the uncongenial climate would permit to thrive. A couple of flaxen-haired children now welcomed with amazement the swallows' return, and bent their heads in laughter and alarm at the sudden flight of the birds right over them.

Olof Grelson had left home long since. He had gone out as a laborer into the woods, since he was given no help to anything else. But with no other capital than his clear head and his power for work, he had soon found means of doing business. He had done well enough, but had lived a hard life and himself become somewhat hard. He was said to be more anxious now than ever to get his maternal inheritance—a wood-lot—into his hands, so that he could act on a larger scale, but certain testamentary conditions bound him. The father op-

posed to his plans his usual silent and superior resistance, still refusing to be drawn into the unrest of modern life, and retaining his contempt for money and what it could achieve. The girl took his side with all the gay determination of her happy nature, so that Olof and his next of kin did not get on well together. Violent scenes had even occurred during the winter. Grels had his daughter with him still, and on her approaching marriage, the son-in-law, a man after his own heart, was to move in and take Olof's place. I met her first of all.

The sun had gone down leaving a chilliness approaching frost, and a perfectly clear, greenish sky, such as is often to be seen when dew falls heavily. I was walking among cultivated lands through a field of barley, and saw the dewdrops lying so thick upon the young stalks that they became all gray and shone like silver. A great yellow moon burst over the edge of the aspen wood, whose still tender foliage had hardly yet begun its eternal trembling. The sound of the water and the thrushes' song penetrated here as everywhere, but so strangely remote were they, so closely interwoven with each other and with the crispness of the air, that they seemed to be part of the past or a dream of the future, rather than the present reality.

From the opposite side of the field I saw a girl coming.

I cannot tell why it struck me that she was going to meet her sweetheart, though indeed that was easy to guess. What was stranger was a feeling of sadness that was also aroused, a slightly shuddering suspicion of the corruption of all things, such as may lie close at hand before the freshest and most spring-like sights in life. Perhaps it was due chiefly to the cold and the twinkling white torch of the evening star in the paleness, and the sounds that filled the air. Perhaps, too, there was a touch of envy in it. She drew nearer, and I recognized her by the cherry redness of her round soft face and by the way in which she bore some flowers in her hand—carefully, as if she held a prayer-book there, too, following the custom of her childhood on a Sunday. She had grown a little taller but was otherwise hardly changed since I last saw her: it was the same elastic yet slightly rigid figure, accustomed to subduing the expressions of the youthful joy she felt in merely being alive. But her hazel eyes shone wide under the brightness of the moon, and even in my presence her mouth could not conceal its smile of radiant happiness. Beyond all doubt it was her sweetheart she was going to meet.

As I passed by, I saw that her feet and skirts were dripping with dew, and her hands and arms bore traces of flower-picking in the damp leaves adhering to them. A few water-drops, shaken down from the bushes, still remained glistening on her

fresh young face and hair. No prettier image of the spring and youthful joy could be imagined, as she walked with the gray dew running down into her tracks.

I stood looking after her, but though she probably felt my gaze, nothing in her careless carriage was altered. Then, as I anticipated, a man appeared from among the bushes, no doubt the expected lover. Her steps became more rapid, and she ran to meet him on the slope, as unconcernedly as though the whole world might see her if it would, and continued her walk close to his side.

They were to marry very soon, and she and her father were often staying here with relatives near the railway-station, on various errands connected with the wedding.

Next day Olof, too, came there for a meeting on some business matter, along with two rather unpleasant-looking men of the small speculator type, half boastful in their sly confidence, half shy in the contrast between their workingmen's limbs and their gentlemen's attire. Olof himself was majestic, tall, and manly, but the lines of energy around his eyes were darker and his mouth harder and more discontented than before.

They established themselves at the inn, where there was much drinking, blustering, and talking. The two strangers eagerly took part in the family dispute, and threw such light upon it as was pos-

sible from their ideas of human nature and its motives. That boded no good, for Olof had made an appointment with the future brother-in-law there, so that all might be made clear between them. Late in the afternoon he arrived, and as he indignantly refused to form one of such a company, Olof, already inflamed with spirits and talking, went outside with him a few yards to discuss matters. The other was an irreproachable but violent man, who had taken the family discords very hardly, with all the charges and counter-charges that had been made.

The subject of conversation was no doubt Olof's desire to sell the timber, or part of it. He wished to engage his brother-in-law on his side, to help him in influencing his father. How it happened no one knew, but a violent quarrel arose, and in his hardly responsible state of semi-intoxication Olof Grelson plunged his knife into his adversary.

The news spread quickly, and the place was full of people when I reached it. They had not thought of taking the injured man away, but had only borne him down to the stream close by.

His true-love was there amongst the first, and had probably helped to carry him. She knelt by the water with his head held close to her, as with mechanically swift, unconscious movements she bathed his temples and forehead with her handkerchief. It was hard to recognize her from the

evening before: her cheeks were paler than any one's, and the eyes that were fixed upon her sweetheart's had almost the same look as his. That look was strange enough, the orbs dilated as though they had wished to leave their seat in his brain and grasp more than can be seen by mortal eye, rigid and as it were frozen beneath his vision in a clarity that might at any moment be broken in pieces like ice. But yet it was calm, and the expression about his mouth was very peaceful, almost happy, as is said to be commonly the case in bleeding. There was nothing dreadful in the sight of him; though the blow had come so suddenly and unexpectedly, it seemed to have come quite naturally, and to have changed nothing in his manly strength.

In her, again, the look came up against something impenetrable and hostile; her immeasurable pain, was thrown back upon a torn and suffering point within her, and winged its way out again towards hope. All her being trembled, like a string under a violent grasp, between memory and the reality. She could not reconcile them with one another, or feel that the same self still existed in a world so rapidly transformed.

The emotion which in her was but internal and which sank down to rest in the figure lying prone before her, broke out in gestures, words, and tears in the men and women at his feet. Arms and hands

were in violent motion, proposals and advice met one another, and with the confused sounds the murmur of the stream and, far away, the roar of the water-fall were mingled in contrasting coolness.

Olof stood apart on a little foot-bridge lower down, darkly outlined against the evening sky, strange and unfamiliar to look at, as error and crime themselves are. He stared down into the water where a red streak of blood from the wound spread into a bubble and floated on beneath his feet into the darkness. His heat had left him : he seemed cold and shook his shoulders now and then, turning away from the reflection of his pale face in the stream but being drawn to it again. In all this scene of terror and amazement, it was he who understood least and seemed most to be pitied.

Grels, whom some one had run to fetch, was seen approaching in the distance at his usual steady pace.

His son saw him coming and turned away as shyly and awkwardly as a guilty child. He went past us in a curve, following the course of the stream, and could be seen from time to time between the stone-gray alder trunks. He was followed by the two men from the inn, who had previously stood apart, not knowing what to do. Their flight was absently watched but soon forgotten. Hope was aroused in all when the "doctor" was seen coming, and they had no thoughts for other

things. Even the girl's look brightened. Only the injured man lay unmoved.

Grels stooped down and made his examination, his strong and practised hands moving carefully over the uncovered body, his eyes gazing calmly and clearly into those of the wounded man but avoiding those of his daughter. It seemed as though he designedly kept all thought at a distance, so that from his usual intuition he might gain full certainty. He raised his hand in token of silence, and listened and pondered. The murmur of the water close by and in the distance rose up louder amongst us.

It was not hard to anticipate his verdict, for now it was a dying man's last rattle that broke out.

The girl stretched out her hand and seized her father's. She had not understood or noticed what had just taken place. An anguished cry of hope seemed to lurk in her shining brown eyes, a spark of light, a flood of glad tears longing to burst forth. She forced Grels's eyes to meet hers and confirm her hopes. His look was very deep and still, wonderfully and awfully still.

"Father!" she cried, and at that moment she understood. Her voice was hushed, and the gleam faded from her eyes; she let his hand fall and thought only of her dying lover. She cherished every movement he could yet make, every sign he might perhaps give that he knew her to be there.

She tried to keep pace with that panting struggle of his that seemed eternal, and tenderly to enfold with all her thoughts each breath as it rose into the void.

Grels stood up, and half turning from his own trouble, signed to all that she whom it concerned most nearly should be left in peace with her own. In this there was at once something of reverence, of submission to the law of life that casts upon each individual his own incommunicable burden of suffering, and also some contempt for words, however friendly and familiar, before the crushing weight of facts.

"How did it happen?" he asked, in order to divert attention from the scene, though otherwise it was a question of minor importance for the moment. "Who . . . .?"

It was clear that only half had been told him, and that he suspected nothing. None could bring himself to answer, but half unconsciously all turned their gaze towards the spot where the doer of the deed had last been visible.

Grels followed the direction of their eyes, and he, too, looked up along the dark curve of the stream. The obscurity took shape before his gaze, as when one stares upon a maze of lines and blotches, and imagination gives them form. A group of three men could be discerned in the wood, engaged in a kind of struggle. One of them pushed

away the others, who were trying to stop him and still shouted eager counsel after him. Olof came slowly down towards his father and drew near.

"They wanted me to fly," he said, "but what good would that do? I went away because of you, but now I've come back again. What's the use of running? It's all up with me anyhow. Or"—his voice suddenly rose from its dull and lifeless tones into a wild note of struggle that was painful to hear, an impetuous cry against the impossible—"or is there hope, is there still hope?"

The father's hand rose swiftly to his heart and was held there. He was now quite pale, but forced himself to composure.

"That's a deal to come at once," he faltered. "You! Was it you?"

"How do I know? My hand anyhow"—and he looked at it as at some awful unknown object, and seemed sickened by the blood-spots on it and the recollection of their lukewarm feeling. "Yes, of course," he resumed firmly, and as if judging himself irrevocably, "I did it. It was my evil fate. Is there any hope?"

In these few seconds Grels had had time to take in the new circumstances with all that they involved.

"There's always hope," said he, "but not as you mean it, not here in this case." And for answer he merely stepped aside and left the view open.

The dying man was collecting himself for a final

struggle. His eyes shone as though they wished to get back their ordinary human expression before the eddying memories from the dark past; his mouth was contorted with pain and opened wide. It was as though all his being, that unknown thing we call the soul, were striving to break its bonds and sink into something still more unknown but greater, something feared but at the same time longed for.

Olof saw it, but seemed to have no further thoughts or feelings. Dull, fruitless regret stood darkly in his eyes. "If only I had not done it," he seemed to torture himself by thinking, "if! if! If I had not spoilt my life!"

The sister's face repeated the movements of the dear countenance in her lap, took leave of the same memories, stiffened in the same cold. A little more of the strain, and she would have sunk down beside the corpse in the same death.

Then his mouth opened still wider and something broke from it, invisible to all yet to all equally real. Like one of the bubbles of the stream below, it burst with a suggestion of sound and was gone. And immediately—a silent wonder—the struggling lines of the face were smoothed out to rest as before, a rest much deeper than before, a peace such as life never offers, not even in sleep. Before this sublime and noble calm, and the coolness of the air, the murmurs of the water, the sense of

what was fleeing and of what had been and was to be, the tears welled up into the eyes of all, and most abundantly and blessedly into those of the mourner by his head, and no one saw anything more.

Only Olof still stood erect, cut off from the feeling shared by all, dark in his barren regrets, puzzled and boundlessly poor.

Grels had been near his daughter when she was left alone, as though to receive her again into the world of suffering humanity, to assure her of support and comfort there. Before he led her away with him beside the corpse, he went up to his son and looked inquiringly upon him, waiting for his final words. The unhappy youth had not a thought to meet him with, hardly even a look.

"I shall stop here," was all he said, "till they take me."

"That was what I expected of you." And to that side of the matter he gave no further heed: it was decided and done with. "If there's anything more, send for me and I will come."

But there was nothing more, and Olof stayed where he was, pondering and brooding. No one kept guard over him; evening came, and he still sat there—until they took him.

After that I saw no more for the time of Grels and his children. I read of the trial in a newspaper. Olof denied nothing, but could explain nothing,

either. He made an impression of firmness, manliness, but of a certain rigidity also. The sentence was as mild as the law allowed, but still hard enough—several years' imprisonment.

And summer turned to winter, and summers and winters followed each other again, and time went on.

Once more I journeyed to those parts, and found the same spring again and everything as before.

I asked after Grels, whether he was still alive, and how it was with him.

Yes, he was still alive, and just the same. Why not?—The event seemed to be forgotten.

And the daughter, was she married?

No—and now they remembered—no, she was not married: she had not forgotten him who was dead. She was indeed quite changed. Not old yet, at least in appearance, but very grave. Like her father, she never laughed, and she resembled him closely now in all her ways. When there were sick-beds to visit or other things to do, they always came together, and the names of both were now mentioned with the respect that had always been paid to his.

And the son, Olof, was he still in prison? Was anything known of him?

They reckoned up on their fingers. Yes, he must be still in prison, but his term would soon expire.

It might do so any time now, perhaps. But besides this they knew little about him.

Grels had once gone down to see him, but Olof had only sent the message: "I am still the same, I am not worthy," and Grels had quietly come home again. "What man is," he had said to those who had marveled at the answer, "comes from within. If he has that within him which I am waiting for, it will break out some time, and if he has it not, there's still less use in talking. He shall be welcome if and when the time has come."

They had asked if he had sent word to his son that he forgave him, but his only answer was: "What magic could that do? We do not live on other's words. No, I sent no message, and I have nothing to forgive, either. Should I push in between my son and his fate?"

They found these words incomprehensible enough, but no one entered into discussion or judgment of them, since it was Grels who spoke them, and he was a man apart.

The vicar had also once been in the county town and had talked with the prison chaplain there. The latter had nothing good to report. The prisoner was unlike any whom he had had to do with, blameless in his conduct, composed and calm, but quite unapproachable so far. Religion took no hold upon him, he had no desire for freedom and yet did not fear it, either. His inner life seemed shut

within a vault more firm than the prison roof, that of hard, unyielding necessity. "It is all so senseless," he would often say. "If they had taken my life in return I could have understood it, but to keep me here is petty and stupid." The officials feared that he might be one of those born criminals whom an inexorable fate seems to drive farther and farther along the path they have once trodden, and they were anxious when they thought of him as free.

That was what I learnt, and I did not think I should meet any of the three again.

But one day another well was to be dug, and Grels came to the spot to practise his old art. I went there to see him once more.

He sat on the ground, just as when I first made his acquaintance, to rest and collect his strength, and, as before, his hand absently caressed and stroked the grass. He was greatly changed, though those about him had not noticed the fact. He was now an old man; the hair had receded from his forehead and was very gray; his back was slightly bent. His eyes, still as clear as a child's, now showed a kind of inner darkness behind every thought: the mystical had penetrated into them.

His daughter sat near him among the flowers. She no longer seemed to think of picking them, but looked upon them as precious and well-loved

things. She took in the air with deep breaths, her complexion uniformly flushed with the effort of rowing, her hands resting in her lap like tired servants who have done their duty and have now no more to occupy them. Her look, too, was a little tired. It traveled round in friendly yet sober fashion, as though to say: It is all so wonderfully glad and lovely here, there can be none who needs me! There was health in all her presence yet, but none the less she contrasted with the shining, budding life about her.

It was an amazingly rich and smiling spot of earth.

The slope was steeper here than elsewhere, and flowed down to the river-bank with the contours from the heights above clearly perceptible beneath the fine grass. Against the wall of pine-woods stood the birches with their shining white stems and foliage like pure golden scent and vapor, yet so thick that only above their tops could the dark lines of the pine trees form a background. The river lay open to the view, curled into ripples where the fall began. It burned and flashed in a thousand flames, while great shell-like patches sank into the blue and reappeared. Farther off, before it curved, it lay serene and wide as the heavens themselves, reflecting fleecy clouds. And between points and islets, stretch upon stretch of water showed itself.

The sunlight, streaming down upon the green

slope, seemed to have been broken as by a prism, and transformed direct into the colors of the flowers. They stood thick in clumps and circles, cowslips and anemones, saxifrage and buttercups, blooming in unwonted profusion. From the new-built farm, all clean and shining with its shingle roof, a light blue smoke arose. A whistle from a locomotive pierced the air, and the train rolled past at a distance, bearing its unknown freight, and sharpening by the noise it made the effect of quiet and seclusion.

When he had rested his tired arms, Grels rose and with practised eye looked long and searchingly around.

He seemed to expect quite a particular pleasure in this case from the finding of life-giving streams, and his bent head could be imagined to be listening already to their gentle bubbling and murmuring in the depths. He walked away and cut a hazel-twig, slowly, and after careful choice.

The eyes of the onlookers followed him, and no one but myself paid any heed to two men who were approaching and had stopped by the farm. There was something in their clothes and bearing that was foreign to the district, and I therefore watched them with attention.

At once I recognized that it was Olof and probably an attendant from the prison. They must have come direct from there. On account of their mis-

givings, the authorities had not wished to leave the prisoner alone until they got him home.

Even at a distance his face could be seen to be pale from his confinement, and perhaps also from emotion. I gave an involuntary shiver. To think that he should come just now, in the midst of all this, in the spring-time!

For him it must have been a strangely moving spectacle. Those last days in prison, with the future anxiety drawing nearer and nearer, the question: What have you to do with life out there, what road will you take in it to hide yourself? And then the change of seasons taking place, more rapidly for him than for others, guessed at in a glimpse over a wall, the dance of motes in the sunlight streaming through a grating, beyond his reach like all else that he had lost, forfeited with all the other joys of life. The day of release came, and all this was over. It was a world ready-made that he looked out upon, a world with no place for him, lovely but strange.

After that the journey north through woods that resembled his own, over rivers with their familiar and stimulating voice. Then, suddenly, spring again, hope, joy as an aching possibility once more. But, anon, memory still heavier than before, that which was forfeited still more irrevocably lost.

He turned dizzy, and half to gain support, half also out of a desire to remain unseen, he pressed

himself against the corner of the house and stood there watching, silent and still.

Grels had his dowsing-rod ready, and walked in a stooping position over the grass. The rod began almost immediately to tremble in his hand, for there must have been water all around, but he searched for the best vein and went up and down the slope, to and fro, with his eyes on the ground and the light playing about his bent and aging figure.

I could imagine how the eyes of the young man over there must be dilating at the sight, how his memory would go far back, and how, as in childhood, a mysterious reverence would fill him at the sight that met his eyes. I could see him peering at the signs of old age and sorrow, and could fancy that all must seem strange to him as a dream, whose meaning we search for even in sleep.

Grels had found the vein, had followed it up, stopped where the rod pointed down as though never to be removed from the place, pushed it firmly into the ground, and raised his eyes.

The first sight that met them was his son's white face right opposite. All the others saw it at the same moment.

Grels stood still and let his hands drop. They trembled as the rod had lately done, then fumbled about in a curious manner, were checked, fell down, and stopped half-way. Suddenly they were pulled

up as by some alien power, and with clear eyes and outstretched arms he stood waiting.

There came the prodigal, lurching rapidly over the grass and almost falling. He reached his father, and with violent sobs buried himself in his bosom. They both stood trembling.

I turned towards the sister. She had grown white and was looking at them. No doubt she had "forgiven" him, as the phrase goes, but now, when she saw the slayer of her lover close at hand, she felt how hard it was to mean that word sincerely, and the chilling memory rose up before her. The sound of the waterfall was in her ears now as then, and she seemed drawn dizzily along by it towards all the grief and horror that the years had dulled but could not kill.

Gently but firmly Grels freed himself from his son's convulsive grasp, held him at arm's length, and looked into his pale shining face and feverish eyes. Olof made no movement to hide his head. As it seemed without a thought of himself, he let his soul be searched by that strange, clear, mysteriously omniscient look. Neither of them cared that all were looking at them, however much it was otherwise against their natures to reveal their inward feelings. Quite alone they stood there, existing only for each other, two of one stock, meeting soul to soul.

"Father, Father," the words came at last, stam-

mering and childishly simple in the moved and deep manly tones, "I love you!" The bareness of the phrase made its meaning richer, and calm and firm came Grels's answer: "'Tis a good and blessed sight, my son. I knew that I should see it one day. And so of all the rest there need be no more words between us."

And he gripped his son's hands as if in greeting between equals, in token of redress and dismissal from all the past.

Retaining one hand, he drew him towards his sister. "Here," said he, "you have something to try to win back. Me you have always had." And he left them together. It might be for fear of disturbing them, out of a deep and delicate feeling that even he could only interfere as a stranger in their reconciliation. Or perhaps he needed action if he himself was to regain the calm that so far he had only forced himself outwardly to show. However it was, he seized his spade with hands that trembled slightly, and went back to work at the spot where the well was to be.

The man from the prison now came up to state his errand. With the commission of trust he had, and his irreproachable bearing as the representative of law and order, though not in uniform, he could not but feel himself to be a person of importance in this circle, and the consciousness appeared in all his square and rigid figure. He began by a

long speech in the style of an usher of court (not much dryer, incidentally, than the style of his superiors) of how he presumed that this was his charge's father etc., and since at the prison they had had certain misgivings etc., and were fully convinced of the importance of a firm and consistent future upbringing for the prisoner on the grounds laid down by the authorities—with much more of the like nature—therefore . . . . But he never brought his period to a close.

Grels nodded at him with a friendly smile, and with the mere look broke off his stream of words. Without further explanation he set his crowbar into the ground, and while the man, silenced by resentment and doubt, drew back a step or two, he began his work.

It proceeded with swift, hopeful, swinging movements, the iron clanged against the stones, and as the sunlight wove its glory about him and all his being, he seemed younger and stronger than before.

The brother and sister were left standing silent, staring into each other's white and altered faces. They looked, not as one does at something real, but as upon an apparition, such as excited minds may see when a sudden impression of light paralyzes the outward power of perception. Their feelings were too deep for words, their tongues were tied, the present had no meaning for them, the

memories of the past alone took life again in bodily shape.

There were long years of mourning and bitterness for her, of dark despair for him, hopelessness in the patient fulfilment of the daily tasks, and in the emptiness of prison. The dead man was between their feet, and the deed that had broken both their lives rose up between them with paralyzing chill in the murmur of the waterfall.

Shyly and doubtfully the brother raised his hand, the sister saw the movement, met it with her look, and trembled. For a moment they both stared at it, as if they saw the spots of blood there still. They were as far as ever from each other, and had they spoken, the words would have sealed a lifelong parting.

But they were silent, the hand sank back as timidly as it had risen, and their eyes met once more. They lived back into their memories again.

For her, it was her days of dreaming over the certain happiness awaiting her, for him his early hopes and violent longings after action, power, and life. Their lips twitched mournfully. They went still farther back. They saw each other as children in friendship and in play, in feelings whose warmth was unsuspected, they peered into each other's bloodless faces for any signs of the vanished past, just as in the ashes of a sheet of paper we can trace the shadowy writing.

Then there slowly passed over both a transformation, coming from within with a gentle light that spread radiant into the look and even penetrated to the pallid cheeks. It was no longer his own self that each saw, the other was no more a stranger there. The bridge was stretched from soul to soul, the time for the miracle had come. Brother and sister, merged like dewdrop with dewdrop in the memory of their common happiness, understood each other and forgot themselves, melted in the same compassion for each other's ravaged life. No longer was it one that had offended and one that had been wronged, it was the same sorrow for both, and the same hope rising out of it. Neither of them knew which made the first movement, whose tears it was that drew the other's with them; breast to breast they rocked each other with their tears and reconciliation. And since it came without a word, their feeling had nothing of the limitation of speech. From the deepest depths it rose, instinctively and without end.

When they both looked up, the father's tool was clanging no less merrily. Hand in hand like children they went up to him. He looked at them and nodded, as though the sight were just what he had expected, signed to them to wait a moment, then stooped down, and pried at the ground. A large stone rolled down the slope before them, and a cheerful splashing sound was heard.

Grels threw down his tools and clasped his children to him, standing erect and smiling, with clear eyes and radiant face. At their feet, a bubbling jet rose glittering in the sunshine, the water sprang up a yard from the ground under the subterranean pressure, splashed their clothes, and fell down to run on in a stream through flowers and grass. Like a song the jet burst forth, spontaneous and fresh, and the first stream, still a little clouded with clay and sand, now grew clear and sparkling, the loveliest thing on all this lovely earth.

They stood and looked at it hand in hand, with silent wonder. Lowering their eyes in the sunlight, they gazed dreamily upon the blue surface of the river, where the way led to their home and future life.

And there I left them.

THE GARDENER'S WIFE

[*TRÄDGÅRDSMÄSTARFRUN*]

FROM NYA NOVELLER

1921

The Gardener's Wife

SHE HAD been married several years, and this Easter she was on her first visit to her parents, poor working-people in a country town.

She had long looked forward to showing them her boy, who was tall and strong for his age and really not at all as the pink-toned photograph made him out to be. It had a splendid background of palms and stone parapet, but the child's face had become sulky in vain expectation of the traditional bird, and his clothes fitted him badly. The journey would also be a much needed rest and relaxation for herself. She would be able to sleep till late in the morning, to chat over a cup of coffee all day long, and carefully repeat all the conversations that she herself could remember or that others had engaged in. She would make the very most of everything she had or hoped to have, and tell the price of all the clothes she had brought with her. All this amid smiles of tired happiness, and sighs over vanished youth and folly such as became a little married woman.

The husband had to remain at his post at the Hall, for extensive rose-culture was carried on there, and just at this season the budding stems in the rose-houses required careful attention. They

promised particularly well this spring, and the gardener and his wife built not a little upon their percentage of the sale. It was in anticipation of this windfall that her journey could be thought of.

Yet she got very little pleasure from it. The child took cold on the railway journey, was ill when they arrived, and caused only trouble, which made the grandparents grumble and distressed the mother. Then danger and panic followed. The boy grew worse and worse for a few days, and died when he could live no longer.

The mother was distracted, but as generally happens with the poor, it was not the loss itself that she was free to mourn. Circumstances took care that there should not be wanting those anxieties for trifles which at once tear open and conceal the wound. The luxury of a complete and undisturbed sorrow may be as unattainable as extravagances much more pleasant. The financial question, as always, obtruded itself.

The boy's illness had cost something, and her purse had been carefully adjusted to previous conditions. A living child of tender years may travel free upon the railway, but a dead one has lost this right, along with many others more agreeable. He has suddenly become a very serious and important personage, whose dignity necessitates a number of arrangements and ceremonies. To buy

a coffin now could not be thought of, and, moreover, the mother would have found it infinitely hard to leave her dead child alone in the luggage-van, in return for a receipt. When it was still so cold, too! Besides, she had no money to pay the carriage: she had only her return ticket. To go home alone on this, after having had the child buried in the town, was still more dreadful to think of. And besides, that plan, too, was impracticable on account of the expense. The only thing left to do was to go back as she had come, with the dead body on her knee, pretending that it was a living child. It was a dangerous undertaking, a swindle with Heaven knew what penalties attached to it. Yet it must be carried out, and that quickly, as soon as she had got the death certificate, if it was to be possible at all. That was quite enough to think over and torment herself about all that evening and night, and in her terror she had neither strength nor opportunity to mourn for her child as she would have wished. It almost seemed to her that it would not have been so bad at all if he had only died at home.

Next morning she was at the train very early. She wished first of all to find a place in the corner of a ladies' compartment, as mercifully dark as could be found. She was most afraid of the ticket collector, the natural foe to an enterprise such as hers. He was terrifying enough in any case, with

the shining buttons even on the back of his uniform, and a many-eyed vigilance, an inflexible sense of justice, that were in some way connected with them. Much depended, too, upon her traveling companions, whether they were quiet people who would let her keep her lips closed, or meddlesome families with children. The last possibility froze her blood. The thought of the little ones climbing about, or only sitting staring with eyes that could open and shut, was one that was not to be borne.

"Why did I have him?" she thought. "What does it all mean? There's no meaning in it, no meaning at all." That was the worst part of her grief.

However, Fortune seemed willing to favor her, for only two persons came into her compartment. One was an elderly woman with purple in her hat, and an abrupt, reserved air, who was entirely taken up with looking after two parcels and an umbrella. The other was a younger woman, dressed in rusty black, with the rings looking very large on her thin hand. She stared out of the window most of the time, and dared not look at any one.

The train rattled out of the station, swaying to and fro as it caught the points. The noise was dreadful, and the increasing light distressed her. But to have left this place of misery was at least something gained. Part of her terror, it seemed, might be left behind there. There was hope in the

fact that the carriage containing her could really have begun to move.

All was silent till the collector came along and punched the tickets with his tightly nipping instrument.

"How old?" he asked, indicating the bundle on her knee.

"Two years, going three."

"That's what they all say." He measured them both with a look of experienced mistrust. "Tall for that age! When was his birthday?"

Had she faltered at all in her answer, he would have suspected something. The gardener's wife knew that, and heroically restrained the trembling in her voice. She thought she ought to smile, and managed to do so, in spite of the memories that the question aroused.

"Twenty-third of June, Midsummer Eve."

"Capital! Well, you know best, I suppose, since it's so easy to remember," said he, with elegant facetiousness. "Then he must have his bucket and spade, don't forget! It must be a boy, at least?" He peered again, but could not catch a glimpse of the child's face. "Very tall, anyhow!" He could not get away from that.

"Yes, such a big, fine boy! But he only looks so tall because he's lying down. When he stands up, he's only so high."

She tried to measure, but could not recollect,

and stopped short with a trembling of the hand. "I daren't wake him," she added anxiously; "he's a little poorly, and sleep is so good for him."

The old woman on the same seat joined in with evident concern:

"For Heaven's sake, what are you doing? Let's have no children crying! In a train they never finish. As bad as canaries when your sewing-machine's working; the more noise there is, the louder they sing."

The mother did not like this way of speaking of her boy, but was glad enough of the help. The official was scared at the mere thought.

"All right, then," he grumbled, and disappeared. The woman opposite turned her pale face with interest towards the interior of the compartment.

The gardener's wife breathed once more, and was almost happy since the first and worst ordeal was over. The woman in black she was not afraid of, but the older woman was certainly dangerous, so that it was still necessary to be very cautious. It had hurt her to talk as she had done, just as if her little one were alive, but still it had been wonderfully easy. "I'll pretend to myself, too, that it is so," she thought; "that's the only way." She was pleased that now she was practically acquainted with her fellow-passengers.

"My boy doesn't cry," she said. "He's always

good, though he's not quite well just now. Nothing serious," she added quickly, so as not to arouse too lively an interest and also to delude herself. She pressed the terribly rigid little body to her, so that everything looked well and safe.—"Nothing serious at all, now."

"He lies uncommonly still," answered the old lady, without reflecting any further about them.

"He always does that when he knows he's with me. Else it may happen . . . . But now he's so safe that he doesn't even turn round."

"Then he must be quite well again."

"Oh, yes!" Here she saw that she ought to smile once more. "There's nothing much the matter with him now. I was a bit anxious, because we were away from home, but now . . . ."

She herself almost believed what she said. Just about as much as she did any other time when she had said to herself, "I am happy," and had felt at the same moment that there was something dangerous in those words. One should never try to look behind them, but should think: "It must be so, since it looks so now."

The rattling speed of the train came greatly to her assistance. The shadows of the telegraph-posts glided constantly by the window, and trees and other objects moved their positions like clouds. It was as though one could not have taken hold of anything, even had one wished, in this constant

hurrying on without stopping: everything seemed to be in a state of flux. On the fields the snow lay hard and gray; behind, the woods shot past with the blue mist of a thaw gleaming between the tree-trunks, and here and there a ray of sunshine. It was like a screen that seemed to represent something but was nothing real. Everything became what one would have it be, and the traveler merely flew onwards without really knowing how. The whole thing was a kind of dizzy game.

"Yes, I am so happy now," she resumed, in order to be really sure of her ground, and that no silence might set in. For in this case one could not be certain what a silence might bring forth.

The old woman paid no heed to the information, but got up and counted her two parcels, so as to assure herself that no thief had slipped in behind the ticket-collector's back. But the other passenger looked at the group opposite her with a thin and melancholy smile.

"Children are too delightful," she said, with one of those suppressed and slightly sluggish voices that at once convey an impression of very few ideas and very little joy in life. But the gardener's wife did not know what to make of her look and tone, and suspected them of being slyly penetrating. That she could not bear, just when she had found the right way of jesting bravely and bearing up. People ought to help her instead and believe

her at once, so that she might find it easier to believe herself.

"Yes, that's so," she answered in a superior tone, and raised her chin to show how confident she was.

"I have never had any of my own."

Now there could be no doubt as to her innocence, for the words sounded so heavy and dejected that it was evident that she was thinking only of herself. The gardener's wife felt her own importance and enjoyed it, while at the same time she clung more firmly to the fiction she had invented.

"That's a pity," she said, but there was no real sympathy in her tone, for she had no strength to spare just then. "So you've never known what it is to be a mother."

The remark was obvious, but that did not occur to either of them. On the contrary, both pondered long upon the thought, which they found new and wonderful enough. The gardener's wife lifted her chin a little higher, and was not afraid, although the sunshine suddenly broke in upon her.

"N-no, perhaps not," the other agreed humbly, and blew her nose, "perhaps not, though of course one can imagine. Especially when one has wanted them badly."

And then out came her secret, clumsily and childishly.

"I have done so for many years now, and I have been a widow since last summer."

"That's very sad. I must condole with you," said the gardener's wife, and blushed as she said it, for the phrase was hardly polite and suitable so long afterwards. But the other was obviously no judge of such matters.

"Thank you," said she, and then passed on to that which filled her thoughts. "It's my work that makes me do it."

"Oh?"—What had that to do with it, and why were people so intrusive?

"I sew for a baby-linen firm. They don't pay well, and you have to be quick. But it's pleasant work."

The gardener's wife became interested. She had often admired these little garments and wanted them for her boy. She should like to know if they were hard to make, and what they might cost.

"When I have been sewing at cloaks and hoods, those cloaks of white cashmere with swan's-down, I have thought how nice it would be to make one for my own little girl."

"A boy is best," said the gardener's wife, and raised hers a little on her benumbed arm.

"Yes, perhaps, but they don't have hoods with that soft stuff in them. It was always a girl I thought of. And I do still," she added, with a smile still more helpless than before. "When the hood's

freshly finished and I have tied the ribbons on to try them, then especially . . . ."

At these words the gardener's wife saw before her something which she had often noticed without thinking of any comparison with children. She saw roses that had been wrapped round with cotton so that they should not open too fast. All the great rose-house at home stood before her as the March sunshine streamed in, more light and clear than anything else in the snow-covered landscape with its shadows of blue. In the light shone delicate green leaves and slender stems, and the buds grew so thickly that they looked unreal. There sometimes one became gravely glad at heart. "I will hold fast to that," she thought; "it is there I will pretend to be." In her overwrought state she was easily able to delude herself, especially if she half-closed her eyes, so that the sunshine glittered on the lashes. It was only as if in the distance, and with a constant wondering what it was, that she heard the train rushing on its way.

"I have even sewn a hood," continued her companion shyly and artlessly, "out of bits that were left over once. When I take it up, I think that I have had a child that has gone, and that by this time it would have been something."

The gardener's wife started, opened her eyes, and fastened upon her a gaze so dark that she grew quite frightened.

"Don't talk like that!" she said.

The seamstress was at once convinced that she had been foolish, and regretted her confessions. "I fancy her only quite little," she made haste to add, for fear of ending too abruptly, "never that she will grow up."

The mother answered nothing, and by a great effort managed to think nothing, either. She blinked and felt the sunshine upon her face, and had a moment's peace again. The old woman broke in with a voice so decided and loud that she was afraid the child would be wakened.

"Better not to think any farther," she said.

"Why not?" asked the seamstress, confidingly.

"Hm! Any one can see you've never had any! When they're small, you get a little pleasure out of 'em for your trouble, or at least you think you do. But once they can understand, the trouble begins, and when they grow up, there it is ready for you." And she continued in obvious personal bitterness, though she avoided giving examples, to recite a whole jeremiad of the woes and sufferings that await a mother—the bad companions that come along in their time, the untruthfulness so easily learned, the lightness of adult age, crime at the worst, ingratitude all the while.

The seamstress gazed at her in terror, crushed by her wisdom and experience, yet eager to defend one who could not defend herself.

"My little girl would never have been like that," she faltered. "She would have been called Amelia,"—at which she felt herself pitiably silly and stopped short.

The old lady laughed good-naturedly.

"Oh, I've nothing against her, of course. I'm only speaking of children in general. And, anyhow, girls aren't the worst. They've got to learn what it means to have them, too, and if they come back badly knocked about, still they generally do come back in the end. But the boys, those that you were weakest for, they know how to pay you back."

And now her words became harsher than before. It was plain that she had had recent experience of trouble on account of some son, and it may have been from a prison cell she was returning. She was a shrewd old woman, who seemed to have many ideas in her head, and she tried to get to the bottom of that which lay before her. If one could only keep them, that was her complaint: if only they didn't despise one, so that everything one could teach them was thrown away on them. But sooner than anything they learn that a mother is to be looked down on, because she is only a woman, while they are men. The idlest grin of any of their own sex counts for more than her best words. It isn't the father's custom to say much, and he doesn't like being worried. And so things

have to go as they may, well or ill, always away from her as soon as others begin to take hold.

"Then you have to get your bits of things together and look after them for yourself as well as you can," she concluded; "they'll have 'em after you, and that's all there is to it."

She counted her parcels again like an experienced and weary soul, who had no illusions left, and was tolerably well content with her loneliness.

The gardener's wife could not bear her, and would not sit in silence and agree with her. She seemed to separate her from the child with her cold words. That must not be, and least of all now. Every time her thoughts were on the way to follow her, the air grew empty and awful, and something infinitely sorrowful, far worse than anything the old woman talked of, seemed ready to fall upon her. She refused to know what it was. She closed her eyes, as long as the words continued, and found her wondrous peace again in the sunshine and the clear vision of the roses and the green. When they ceased, she began to talk to the seamstress, for with the other she would have nothing to do. She found the words so quickly that she amazed her listener, who had never before seen such burning eyes or such a fevered flush coming and going on the cheeks.

"My boy isn't like that," said she; "he's never given me an uneasy moment, and he never will.

He's such a darling! It's a pity he's asleep, so that I can't show him. So round he is, and red, and healthy: you never saw such a boy. And he'll never tell me a lie. You can see that in his eyes, and besides, he's too fond of me. He's so strong, he can carry the little watering-can, and he follows close behind me like a little dog, when I go and look after the roses. Sometimes he sits and goes to sleep quite quietly till they've been attended to and his turn comes. Then the sun shines in on his hair: in the evening it can get right in. And then I haven't got the heart to wake him!"

The seamstress sat filled with desire to see such a wonderful child, and from her joyless existence she felt a kind of envy rise up against wealth so vast. But stronger still shone admiration in her pinched features. Both envy and admiration pleased the mother, and she became quite confident. Even the old lady turned a friendly look upon her, though of this she took no notice. She talked on, of all she could remember, from the first little feeble smile at something shining by the bedside, the first word, and then of all the further progress week by week. These things seemed still more wonderful and promising now than when they had happened. Every memory had the sunshine over it, and it was as if no other light had ever been. Her past and present happiness amazed herself. The old lady yawned at these prolix com-

monplaces, but the seamstress could never have enough of them. Her innocent questions constantly gave rise to something new, and she, too, was equally amazed, so that the mother thought that she had never met such agreeable company. She was only troubled by her look, which would not always meet her own direct, but peered from time to time at the little creature on her knee.

"I thought he moved then," she said more than once; "now you'll see that he'll wake up."

But the mother's grip only tightened and she made haste to answer: "No, he needs sleep so badly." Every time, her growing restlessness made her more eager to continue, although she felt fatigue begin to come upon her like a dull and distant headache.

"Let it come," she thought, in a layer of her brain behind that now so busily engaged in finding words. "I'm so happy now, and happiness is tiring, but it's easy to sleep afterwards."

The speed of the train also proved a help to her. It obeyed her will as it rushed on among shadows which never grew real; it fled with her from something, what she did not know, but something that was powerless to hold her. Sometimes the whistle shrieked wildly and strangely, almost as though the whole train were about to hurl itself down a precipice and be smashed to atoms. And so it might, for aught she cared, for then she could

sleep best of all. And every time she held her little burden the tighter, overjoyed to be able to press it to her bosom, should the need arise. Meanwhile she never ceased to talk, now of the past, now of the certain future.

She did not recognize herself, she could not tell where she found so many words, she who was so shy and awkward and had few ideas of any kind. Her fellow-travelers, too, began to find it strange to listen to her. They sat staring more and more, and it was not impossible that they thought her brain affected. They knew not that she was living in an atmosphere of poetry, which begins when that of reality is denied. They did not see that it was joy she carried in her arms, joy secure from life's changes, radiant and fair, as long as it was given her to keep it. And the train rushed on, with mother and child, and all that is contained between the words.

THE END

LIST OF PER HALLSTRÖM'S PRINCIPAL WRITINGS

POEMS: *Lyrik och fantasier,* 1891; *Skogslandet,* 1904.

PLAYS: *Grefven af Antwerpen,* 1899; *Bianca Capello,* 1900; *En veneziansk komedi,* 1901; *Erotikon,* 1908; *Två legenddramer,* 1908; *Två sagodramer,* 1910; *Karl den elfte,* 1918; *Gustaf den tredje,* 1918; *Nessusdräkten,* 1919.

SHORT STORIES: (collections) *Vilsna fåglar,* 1894; *Purpur,* 1895; *Briljantsmycket,* 1896; *Reseboken,* 1898; *Thanatos,* 1900; *Berättelser,* 1902; *De fyra elementerna,* 1906; *Nya noveller,* 1912.

LONGER TALES AND NOVELS: *En gammal historia,* 1895; *Våren,* 1898; *Döda fallet,* 1902; *Gustaf Sparfverts roman,* 1903; *En skälmroman,* 1906.

ESSAYS, etc.: *Italienska bref,* 1901; *Skepnader och tankar,* 1910; *C. V. A. Strandberg,* 1912; *Levande dikt,* 1914; *Konst och liv,* 1919.

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